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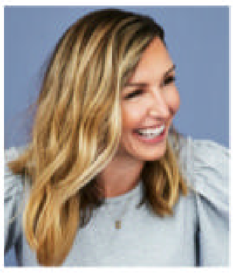
Welcome to Women's Health



I was all set to take 2023 by the horns and start the year with the type of positivity usually reserved for a children's TV presenter. But Covid (third time unlucky) had other ideas. After blighting my December, the illness evolved into flu, and I ended up being treated at home for mild pneumonia. I can safely say I was the most ill I've ever felt. I was bed-bound well into the start of the year, and when I finally ventured into the outside world again, my confidence had taken a battering.

The thought of setting foot inside a gym filled me with dread. You can know on a rational level that people are too caught up in their own workouts to be bothered by you, while still feeling less-than. But there's nothing quite like exercise to give you a mental boost, and being in a gym environment is undeniably motivating. So I took myself off to London's Third Space in Soho. Being January, the gym floor was busy, and I felt nervous navigating the weights area. Having decided that completing a 45-minute session would be achievement enough, I kept the weights light and, while I fatigued quickly, I managed every rep – and felt so much better afterwards.

I've exercised throughout my adult life and, as head of this brilliant brand, I'm well-versed in the mind-body benefits of doing so. Yet I was still daunted by the prospect of walking through the gym's front door. My own brush with gym-timidation gave me a tiny taste of how tough it must be for someone kicking off their wellness journey or reigniting their relationship with exercise. If this is you – and you've chosen *Women's Health* to help you along the way – know that you're not alone, and that it will get easier. Your confidence will grow, your knowledge will expand and, before long, the gym will come to feel like your happy place, just as it has been for me for so many years.

Of course, exercise only makes up a small part of what it means to live well. Quality sleep, smart nutrition and mental health management all have a role to play – and *Women's Health* has you covered on all fronts. I found this month's feature on the growing trend of tracking your blood glucose a fascinating read, while our investigation into the growing market for menopause products – and which ones are worth your hard-earned cash – is a must for anyone navigating this challenging life stage. Finally, I love P!nk's interview on page 22. She's refreshing, down to earth, no nonsense – and I expected nothing less. As for my own health, I'm not quite 100% and I've yet to return to high-intensity cardio. But lifting weights is helping me rebuild both my strength and my confidence.

Until next month...

Claire

Claire Sanderson
Editor-in-chief

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This month, I'm loving

Element Karbon leggings ▶
How fun are these leggings? At £39.50, they're reasonably priced *and* they survive the squat test. It's a win-win.

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◀ **Altrient C**
Experts are raving about the efficacy of this vitamin C supp. It's encapsulated in a microscopic bubble, which protects it from breaking down in the digestive system, allowing direct delivery to cells where it's needed. £49.96 for 30 sachets.

Jones Road What The Foundation ▶
I'm smitten with Bobbi Brown's new brand, Jones Road, and the foundation (£42) is my hero product. It blends in seamlessly, creating a fresh, glowing finish – especially good if you're prone to slightly dry skin.

◀ **Asics Gel-Nimbus 25**
Asics is the king of running trainers, and its latest offering – Gel-Nimbus 25 (£175) – offers supreme comfort and super-soft landings. I can't wait to wear them for long runs.

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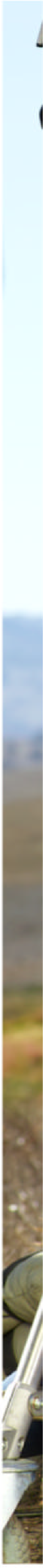

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P!nk

You don't need to give P!nk a reason to get the party started. From handling fame in the early 2000s to feeling the healing power of nature, she talks about living life on her own terms

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Travel with confidence

Launch yourself into something new

If you do one thing this month

Blast some novelty into your routine

Wake up, hit the gym, grab coffee, head to work. You've probs got a routine on repeat. Yes, a structured calendar is unavoidable, but going through life *Groundhog Day*-style causes you to activate the same brain pathways – which isn't always a good thing. Mixing up your manner of operating by tweaking a step or honing a fresh skill can create new neural roads, which helps keep your mind sharp *and* your mood high. 'There's a "wow" factor,' says neuroscientist Claudia Aguirre. 'Novelty taps into that part of the brain that's the reward centre, so you get a dopamine release.' And if you're genetically predisposed to Alzheimer's disease and start learning a language or skill in middle age, research shows you can potentially delay its onset. But make sure you sandwich a solid night's sleep in between. 'Repetition interspersed with sleep seems to be especially potent in driving the formation of connections,' says Alison Barth, a professor of biological sciences at Carnegie Mellon University in Pennsylvania. Say you try a new watercolour painting method, do it again in 12 hours. Chances are, the skill will stick better if you've had seven to nine hours of zzz in between. Ready to spark some mind magic?

WORDS: LYDIA WANG. PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

NEWS YOU CAN USE

Want the latest health intel? We've combed the science journals so you don't have to

In the know

60

The number of seconds you need to raise your heart rate to prolong your life. Research from the University of Sydney found that doing minute-long bursts of activity three to four times a day was associated with significant reductions in the risk of premature death. Stopwatch at the ready.

PIERCING HEADACHE

-

Migraine sufferers, researchers are trying to prove what some have been saying for years: a daith piercing (the fold of your ear above the tragus) can ease symptoms. A trial is underway to measure the effect on migraine sufferers over a year. Experts suspect it offers relief by stimulating the vagus nerve, which runs between your brain and gut.

ROBO CAP

-

News for the 400,000 Brits living with type 1 diabetes: daily insulin injections could soon become redundant. A new drug capsule, developed by Massachusetts Institute Of Technology, has been shown to deliver insulin to the small intestine via a robotic cap that tunnels through the mucus barrier – much like a machine tunnels into rock.

NET GAINS

-

A study* involving volunteers in their forties and fifties has found a link between a higher concentration of omega-3 fatty acids and a larger hippocampus, the part of the brain integral to learning. Consuming more omega-3s was found to enhance ability to understand complex concepts using logical thinking. Choose cold-water fatty fish, such as mackerel and salmon.

HIIT the clock

Riddle us this: what do you get if you combine two interventions previously shown to improve cardiometabolic health? A super-intervention, that's what. A randomised control trial* showed that combining high-intensity interval training (HIIT) with time-restricted eating (TRE) for seven weeks led to a reduction in fat mass and visceral fat in overweight participants who were also at risk of disease. The fat loss was two times greater than either intervention in isolation.

KALE MARY

-

If kale makes you cry, you're in good company. Researchers from Durham University took 4D ultrasound scans of 100 pregnant women to monitor their unborn babies' responses to foods. Carrots elicited a 'laughter face', kale created an expression described as 'cry face'. The researchers believe the foods you choose during pregnancy can influence your child's eating habits in later life.

PERSONA VIRUS

-

When researchers from Florida State University College of Medicine compared the five pillars of personality (neuroticism, conscientiousness, extraversion, openness, agreeableness) of participants pre, mid and late pandemic, they found declines in the latter three traits. The lower scores were equivalent to the personality changes you'd expect to see over a decade.

☑ THE TO-DO LIST

SUPPORT *Eating Disorders Awareness Week; 27 February to 5 March*
There are now 1.25 million Brits living with an eating disorder. Find out more at beateatingdisorders.org.uk.

READ *Transitional: How To Live Your Authentic Life by Munroe Bergdorf*
The activist and writer draws on her own experience to discuss what it means to transition.

WATCH *Arsenal Women vs Liverpool Women, Women's Super League; 5 March, Meadow Park*
Support the Women's Super League in this hotly anticipated fixture.

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Ask WH

I’ve had a break from lifting – any advice for rebuilding my routine?

Good news: your body is primed to make a comeback. With strength training in particular, your brain remembers how it communicated with your nervous system and muscles to perform specific movements (aka muscle memory), says physical therapist and PT Kristi Barker. Still, the key to a successful return is patience, adds PT Simone Williams, who specialises in prenatal and postnatal training.

If you were out for two weeks or less, Barker recommends the 15% rule. ‘Reduce overall load at least 15% the first week back, to see where your baseline is.’ Tune into your body, make sure nothing hurts or feels off and add weight from there, says Williams. Out for four weeks? Strip off the weight plates and put down the dumbbells – at least for now. Williams suggests going back to body-weight exercises, adding small increments of weight as your body gets used to the patterns again.

If your break was longer than four weeks, motivation may present another obstacle. ‘Focus on the type of movement you love, which may be dancing, yoga or lifting, to start, and schedule it into your calendar,’ says Barker. Lastly, if you were sidelined by injury or illness, have a healthcare professional oversee your rehab. ‘They will prescribe exercises that allow you to recover efficiently,’ she adds. Noted.

Turn on to tune up

See things in a positive light

I'm one of life's pessimists. Do I really need to look on the bright side?

Put it this way: the latest addition to 'reasons to be cheerful' is a longer life. In a major study*, high optimism was linked to a longer lifespan and exceptional longevity (living past 90) in women across racial and ethnic groups.

When times are hard, thinking optimistically can be tough. But there are steps you can take to become more positive. Step one: reframe your reaction to roadblocks; optimists tend to better understand an obstacle to be time-limited and specific to circumstances rather than taking it personally, says Lewina Lee, a clinical psychologist. Step two: imagine your best possible self; doing so can guide your behaviour, boosting your positivity, says Suzanne Segerstrom, psychologist and author of *Breaking Murphy's Law.* Step three: be relentless with goals. 'People who believe good things will happen are more likely to work harder at their goals and, so, achieve them,' adds Segerstrom, who suggests listing ways you believe you could overcome any goal-blocking barriers.

Why do I keep talking myself out of achieving my goals?

Our brains cling to the familiar, which can get in the way of opportunities for growth. Say you want to try Pilates, but think you'll be bad at it. When you do try a class, you only notice the teacher correcting you, while others seem to do each move with ease. This is cognitive bias, the brain's tendency to take shortcuts and make quick decisions, says psychologist Leah Katz, author of *Gutsy: Mindfulness Practices For Everyday Bravery*. And some cognitive biases can hold us back. Confirmation bias, for example, entails looking at evidence that supports your beliefs – so you don't notice the Pilates teacher giving pointers to others. You can overcome these biases by being aware of them. Tend to weigh up potential gains against what you could lose by trying something new (loss aversion)? Think of gains as something you're entitled to – if you don't pursue that goal, you'll lose out. Fallen prey to the bandwagon effect of only doing what others are doing? Base your decision to pursue a goal on your values and why you had the idea to begin with.

I'm a night owl, but I need to get up early for work. Help.

Humans have different 'chronotypes' – tendencies to want to wake or sleep at specific times – and they're influenced by genetics. There will be times when your chronotype doesn't match your lifestyle, but waking up early for work doesn't have to be a slog. First thing, wash your face and hands with cold water or open a window for some cool air, suggests Matt Walker, a sleep scientist and professor of neuroscience and psychology at the University of California. During sleep, you're in mini-hibernation but a quick temperature shift tells your brain to wake up and stimulates your cardiovascular system. Next, bask in blue light. Early morning sunshine (a form of blue light) stimulates your brain, signalling that it's time to start the day. A quick stroll outside or opening the curtains can help prep your body for the day, adds neuroscientist Dr Claudia Aguirre. Finally, while you produce cortisol in the wake-up process, adding doses of the stress hormone via a mild shock – a shower ending with cold water – can help if you're rubbing sleep from your eyes. (Another fix? An earlier bedtime.)

WORDS: JACKIE LAM; CURRIE ENGEL; CAITLIN CARLSON. PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES; DAN MATTHEWS. ILLUSTRATION: PETER CROWTHER.
*SOURCE: HARVARD T.H. CHAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Move of the month

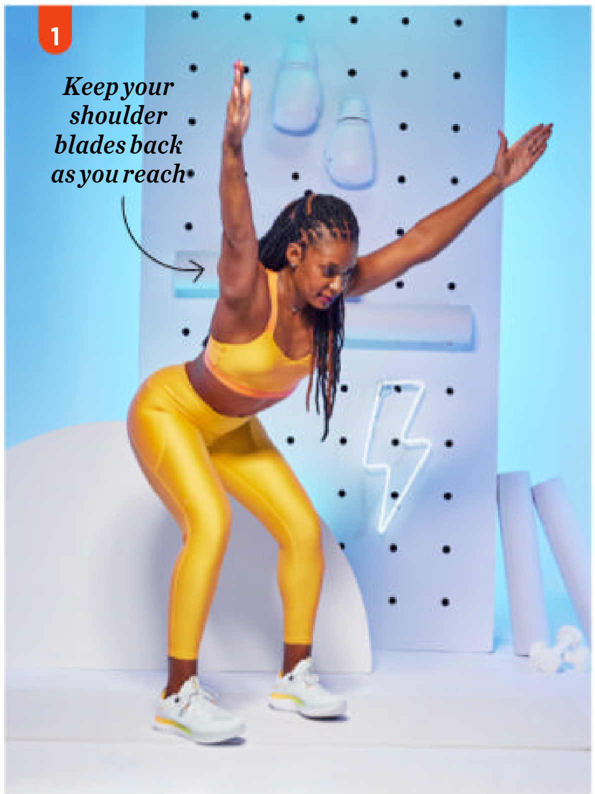
Tension melter

The standing 'YWT' is a simple-yet-effective movement to implement when training your upper half

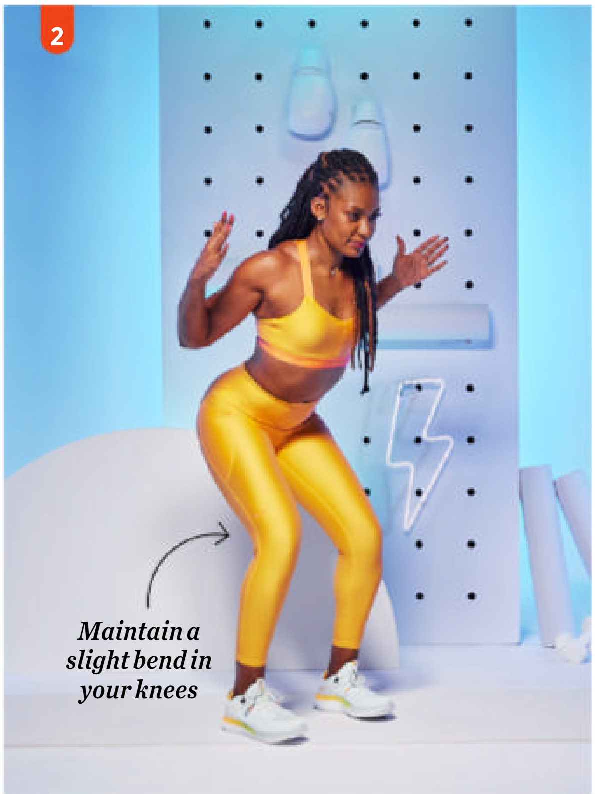
UPPER BODY PRIMER

LEVEL
● ● ○ ○ ○

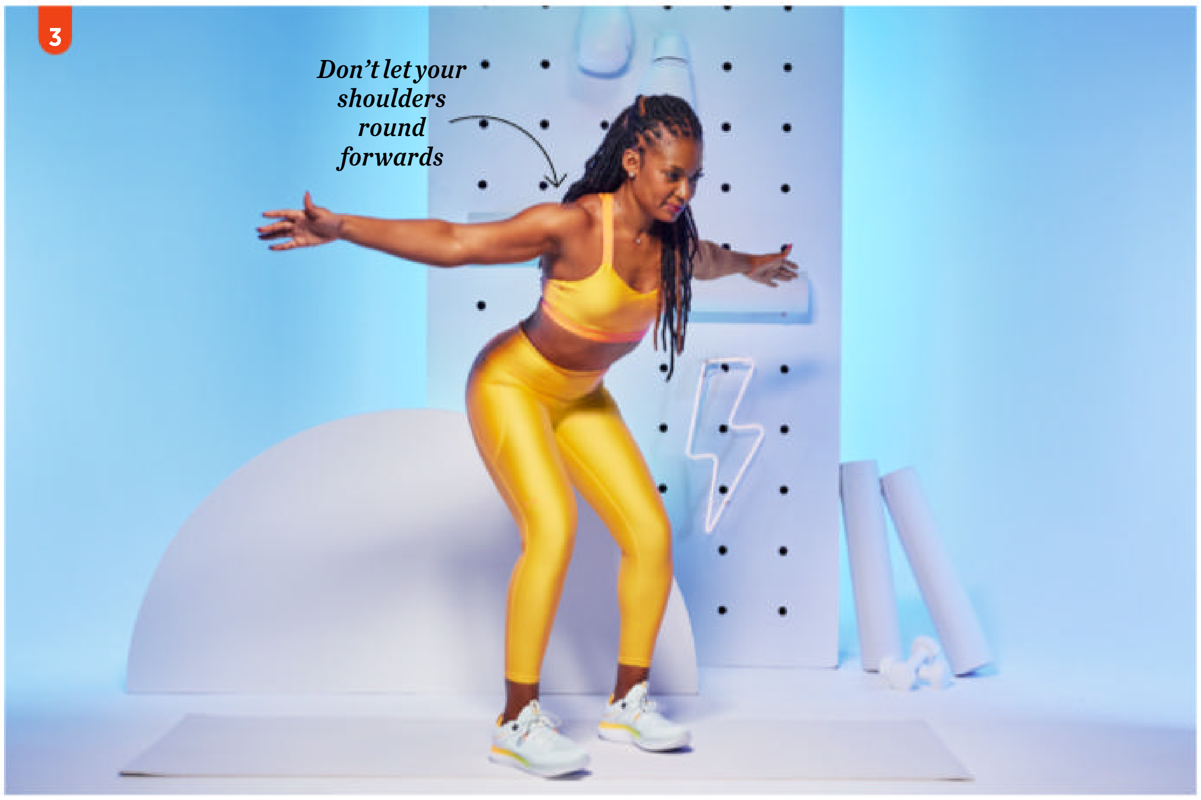
1


Keep your shoulder blades back as you reach

2


Maintain a slight bend in your knees

3


Don't let your shoulders round forwards

WHY WE LOVE IT: Finally, an antidote for hunching over computers and phones – and a strength booster for upper-body days. With each rep, 'you'll gradually increase your range of motion and get your joints ready for movement', says PT Ariel Belgrave. The sequence activates the neck, back and triceps, as well as your rear deltoids, which are a key part of the shoulder and often neglected during warm-ups and workouts, Belgrave adds. Follow these form fixes to ensure the motion ignites your muscles.

STEP 1

HINGE at the hips with your arms straight at your sides. Slowly raise them towards the sky, wider than your shoulders, into a 'Y' shape.

STEP 2

BEND your elbows to the sides and squeeze your back muscles to form a 'W' shape. Don't forget to keep your neck relaxed.

STEP 3

LIFT your arms out to the sides to create a 'T' shape. Make sure your arms are in a straight line, parallel to the ground as you hold.

WORK IT IN

Use the YWT as a warm-up when you're working your upper body. Repeat the sequence for 30 to 45 secs.

LEVEL UP

Add wrist weights or 1kg dumbbells. But don't go heavier – the goal is activation, not fatigue.

SLOW AND STEADY

One of the biggest mistakes Belgrave sees with the YWT is people moving too quickly through the sequence. 'Take your time in each isometric hold, pausing for at least one to two seconds,' she says.

CALLING ALL BEGINNERS

Doing the exercise for the first time? Skip any resistance to really zero in on form and control.

WORDS: JACQUELINE ANDRIAKOS. PHOTOGRAPHY: TYLER JOE. STYLING: ROSE LAUTURE. HAIR AND MAKE-UP: JUSTEN BROSNAN

Food for thought

What does a budget-friendly supermarket shop look like?

Feel like the price of health just got heftier? Dietitian Azmina Govindji explains what a cost-effective food shop adds up to

THE EXPERT
Azmina Govindji, registered dietitian and author of *Vegan Savvy: The Expert's Guide To Nutrition On A Plant-based Diet*

Packing your food shop and waiting to tap your card on the reader shouldn't be a cortisol-spiking experience. And yet, more than half of people feel that the cost of living crisis has negatively affected their health, with rising food costs blamed by 78% in a recent YouGov poll. But watching the pennies doesn't have to add up to beans on toast every night.

The secret to a weekly shop that is cost-effective *and* healthy lies in a phrase you'll have heard many times before: meal prep. It begins with planning your meals for the week ahead, building in flexibility for any offers you may spot while shopping.

Base as many meals as you can around vegetables (using frozen as well as fresh), filling carbs (rice and noodles) and plant proteins (such as tinned beans and dried lentils). Not every meal needs to be perfectly balanced, but ideally you'll include fruit or veg, protein, carbs, healthy fats and dairy or dairy alternatives in each. Get your food groups right and the micronutrients tend to follow. Once you've planned a menu, make a shopping list – and stick to it.

When filling your basket, it pays – literally – to keep an open mind. Opt for wonky, frozen or tinned fruit and veg, which is often cheaper than fresh while just as nutritious; studies show that vitamin C levels in frozen vegetables are higher than those sold as fresh, while a 2014 study in the *Journal Of Agricultural And Food Chemistry* found vitamin B2, vitamin C and vitamin E were stable in frozen fruit and vegetables. If you buy fresh, compare the price per kilo – bagged vegetables and fruit can be more costly than loose.

For your starchy carbs (think potatoes, bread, rice and pasta), look beyond the shelf in your eyeline, where supermarkets often place their most expensive produce; the higher and lower shelves will likely offer cheaper options.

If you eat meat, buy cuts you can afford and tweak your prep. Extra-lean minced beef, for example, is usually more expensive, so buy the best your budget allows and skim the fat off after cooking. Vegan? Get your protein and fibre by throwing tinned beans into curries or stews. It'll also make the dish go further.

Buy extra-mature hard cheese, grate it and freeze in a single layer so you can break off bits when needed. The strong flavour helps you use less. It's worth checking vegetable oil labels, too. They're usually 100% rapeseed oil – a monounsaturated fat like olive oil, but with a lot more omega-3 fats. Consider it a healthy dose of value.

Good value and healthy? It's in the bag...

Women'sHealth FINANCIAL WELLNESS 2023

PHOTOGRAPHY: STOCKSY. ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES; STUDIO 33

ADDS TO BASKET
Three supermarket foods that deliver the most nutritional bang for your buck

① **PEANUTS**
A good source of micronutrients such as magnesium, potassium, niacin, folate and vitamin E. Peanuts contain almost 25% more plant-based protein than other nuts.

② **PLAIN YOGHURT**
Cost-effective large tubs are full of protein and contain calcium, phosphorus and iodine, as well as vitamins B2 and B12. Great served with savoury veg such as grated cucumber and courgettes.

③ **BRAN STICKS**
Fibre-rich wheat bran is good for digestive health and typically provides half your RDA of vitamin D and folic acid. It also has iron and other B vitamins.

Does it really work?

Therabody SmartGoggles for sleep

First, there was the muscle gun. Now Therabody wants to do for your REM what it has done for your DOMS via new SmartGoggles

We nod off in the name of research

THE GUINEA PIG
Bridie Wilkins, fitness editor

When it comes to topics it's poor form to brag about, the ability to fall and stay asleep is up there with how often you turn on your heating. So I'm loathe to admit I've never had an issue with it. I clock up at least nine hours a night and on the rare occasions I don't, you'll know about it. I do, however, feel some degree of stress, most days. So an offer to trial the new SmartGoogles from Therabody – formerly Theragun, which makes the now cult muscle gun – was as tempting as a lavender-sprayed pillow on freshly laundered sheets.

Smart eye masks are nothing new, but the promises of Therabody's version read like a wellness wish list; it's designed to ease facial tension, relieve eye strain, nix headaches and relax your body and mind through heat, massage and vibration. What sets the SmartGoogles apart is their proprietary biometric sensor. It's been proven to recognise your pulse and deliver a slower frequency of vibration and massage that your pulse then starts to mimic, decreasing your heart rate.

There are three modes to choose from. 'Focus' uses heat and massage between your eyebrows – the 'third eye' chakra, said to clear mental blockages when massaged – and your temples, to relieve stress and reduce facial tension by increasing blood flow. 'SmartRelax' uses heat, vibration and a wavelike massage, rising and falling in your temples and the pressure points around your eyes, to induce calm – again via blood flow and relaxing your muscles. 'Sleep' uses heat, consistent vibration and a temple massage.

Despite my hibernation habits – or maybe because of them – my favourite setting is 'Sleep'. There's a dedicated 'TheraMind' section of the Therabody app offering guided meditations, which I try. 'I invite you to find a comfortable position,' the recording begins, as the goggles press against my temples. 'Now feel your attention expand and gently rest behind your eyes,' the calming voice continues. Aaaand... I'm out.

I'm less keen on 'Focus' mode, which I try during a manic workday. The 'third eye' massage is a dream, but the temple massage is so intense I have to turn it down. I'm still not sure, so I switch to 'SmartRelax'. The wavelike vibrations, plus massage, are ideal. I can literally feel my frown relaxing, and once the cycle ends, my Apple Watch shows that my heart rate has dropped from 75bpm to 55bpm.

Something to note is the noise. I could sleep through an earthquake, but if you struggle to doze off, the goggles aren't exactly quiet (imagine a very loud phone vibration). At £174, they're not cheap either, but it's a one-off cost and the results are immediate. I'd never turn down an opportunity to improve my sleep, but it's their success as a stress solution in those moments when bed *isn't* an option that's earned them a permanent place on my WFH desk.

Pair with a guided meditation for a true sense of zen

The verdict

Ease of use	●●●●●●●●●○
Quick results	●●●●●●●●●●
Value for money	●●●●●●●○○○
Stress relieving	●●●●●●●●○○
OVERALL SCORE	●●●●●●●●◐○

How do I know if my skin barrier is damaged?

THE EXPERT
Dr Ewoma Ukeleghe, skincare specialist, founder of Skndoctor

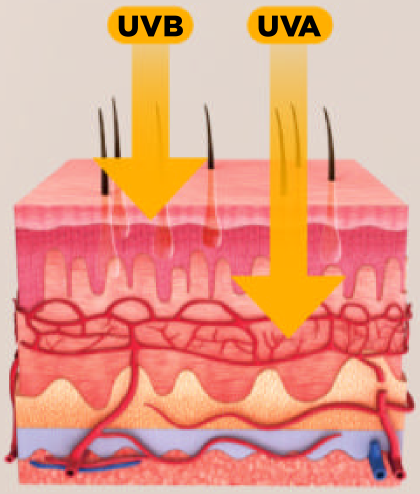
There's a strong chance the term 'skin barrier' has entered your beauty lexicon. It's the outermost layer of the skin and it's being touted as the ticket to a healthy glow. So how can you tell if yours is living up to its USP?

The skin barrier (stratum corneum) is the first layer of the epidermis and is designed to protect the underlying layers of healthy cells. Think of it as a brick wall: these 'bricks' (skin cells) are held together by 'mortar' (lipids, eg, ceramides). They keep vital moisture in and undesirables (such as bacteria and pollution) out.

The good news? The stratum corneum is the layer most affected by products such as acids and retinol. They speed up cell turnover, revealing the healthy cells below. The bad news is that an overzealous approach can erode the skin-barrier function, leading to an irritated, dehydrated and sensitive complexion.

An increase in Google searches for 'damaged skin barrier' suggests many of you are suffering. An explanation as to why begins with lockdown ennui, when excessive skincare became the trend to while away the hours. The signs of an impaired skin barrier? Everything from dryness, roughness, itchiness and redness to sensitivity.

The first thing to do is stop overloading the skin. For daily barrier maintenance, take stock of your skincare routine – stay away from harsh physical exfoliants and avoid products loaded with drying alcohol. A simple routine could comprise a gentle and non-foaming cleanser, serum, moisturiser and SPF during the day and the same routine (minus the sunscreen) in the evening. Focus on hydrating your skin with ceramides and fatty acids, as they help to rebalance a compromised skin barrier. They can be applied at any time of day, so will fit easily into your routine and work best when teamed with peptides and antioxidants.



Care starts on the outside

BARRIER BOOST

① **CeraVe Hydrating Cream-to-Foam Cleanser, £12.50, Boots**
This cleanser has a creamy texture that leaves your skin clean, without feeling that it's been stripped.

② **Dr.Jart+ Ceramidin Cream, £32, Dr.Jart+**
A cult product among skintellectuals, thanks to its proprietary blend of ceramides. Its nourishing shea-rich formulation further supports its benefits to your skin.

③ **Medik8 Clarity Peptides, £45, Liberty**
This milky serum contains 10% niacinamide (a barrier-supporting active), zinc and peptides. I recommend this to anyone with acne or redness-prone skin and a damaged barrier.

④ **Biossance Squalane + Omega Repair Cream, £45, Cult Beauty**
This moisturiser hydrates and nourishes the skin barrier with biomimetic fatty acids and squalane. Ideal for very dry skin.

PHOTOGRAPHY: STOCKSY

What happens when...

...I skip stretching

Like hand-washing your knitwear and flossing every time you brush your teeth, you know you *should* stretch, but do you? Here's the cold, hard truth about not warming up

Lean into dynamic warm-ups

01

Bring the heat

Some like it hot – and by some, we mean muscles. 'A warm-up does exactly that,' says exercise physiologist Tom Cowan. 'It raises the temperature of the working muscles, which, studies show, improves high-intensity exercise performance.' Active heating – warming your muscles through movement – helps you generate more force and make better use of muscle glycogen. Passive heating – eg, via a heat pad – has some impact, but won't offer the full range of benefits. Get warm for the win.

02

Go with the flow

Flow: it's not just for yoga. Blood-flow management is a key component of warming up. At rest, your muscles receive about 20% of your blood flow, with most directed to organs. During all-out exercise, over 80% of your blood can be directed to working muscles, says Cowan. Go in cold and your body has to quickly make circulatory and metabolic adjustments. 'Research also suggests active warm-ups can lead to less reliance on anaerobic energy systems,' he adds. That could mean less fatigue-inducing muscle acidity.

03

Have some heart

You wouldn't inflict high-BPM music on your waking brain. But your body is sensitive to BPM, too. 'Going from 60 beats per minute to 120 is a big jump in workload for your heart,' says Cowan. This is combined with an increase in blood pressure, another side effect of exercise. A steady rise in both through a graduated warm-up – rather than a sudden spike by diving headlong into a strenuous set of goblet squats – may make your training session a bit longer, but it'll get a big tick from your ticker.

04

Joints venture

Dynamic person? A CV cliche. Dynamic stretches? A warm-up winner. They can improve range of motion at your joints and your muscle performance. Plyometric exercises such as box jumps demand powerful contractions and put joints under a big load, so it's important that your body gets fair warning. 'Most evidence suggests static stretching, if not incorporated into an active warm-up, can actually impair performance, whereas dynamic stretching may boost power output,' says Cowan.

05

Mind games

Body warm? Now let's work on your mind. A happy side-effect of warming up is a confidence boost. 'Your warm-up is a time when you can start to switch off from whatever you were doing before and turn your full attention to the workout you're about to tackle,' says Cowan. 'It's also an opportunity to practise sport-specific movement patterns or skills, like a striker taking several shots on goal before a football match.' Aim for about 10 to 15 minutes of movement before the real work begins.

WORDS: TOM COWAN. PHOTOGRAPHY: STUDIO 33

Ask the Fit Squad

Want to run further, lift heavier or nail your first pull-up? Each month, we put your questions to our team of the finest fitness brains to give you the tools you need to make good on your goals

Q I do a full-body workout three times a week. Should I start using workout splits?

Izy George says: The unsexy answer is that is depends on your goal. First, a definition. A workout split involves breaking up a strength-training programme into different days for different muscles to ensure adequate effort and recovery time.

If your goal is to increase your general fitness, then three full-body sessions a week may be sufficient if you give your muscles enough time to recover between workouts and each session hits all your muscle groups.

But if it's strength or muscle growth you're after, results will only come if you work each muscle group enough per week; if your total-body sessions include random and/or similar exercises (think squats and split squats), you'll struggle to make gains.

To solve this, you could try a push/pull split. This involves working the muscles you use to push (such as your shoulders and triceps) and pull (your biceps and back) in isolation. This kind of split ensures you place enough volume on each muscle group, without overtraining them. Scheduling in rest time is essential for muscle growth (aka hypertrophy); it's when your body repairs the tears made in muscle tissue during exercise, helping them to grow back stronger.

Below are two examples of splits: a push/pull/leg split and a lower-/upper-/total-body split. With the former, time when you do each workout around other forms of activity in your week. If you're going for a run, for example, leave the longest gap between this and your legs workout, so that you don't overload your lower-body muscles. Don't fancy scrapping your full-body sessions? Try the lower-/upper-/total-body split. This will also ensure you give each muscle group ample stimulus and rest to promote hypertrophy. Whatever you decide, always tailor it to you; what you want to achieve and, crucially, what you enjoy doing.

STANDARD
45 LBS
20.4 KGS
BARBELL

Your goals: smashed

A PUSH/PULL SPLIT

Day 1: Push workout: chest press, overhead press, front/side shoulder raise, tricep press, tricep dip

Day 2: Rest/active recovery (30- to 60-min walk)

Day 3: Pull workout: bent-over row, seated row, lat pull-down, bicep curl

Day 4: Rest/active recovery (30- to 60-min walk)

Day 5: Rest

Day 6: Legs workout: squat, deadlift, lunge, step-up, hip abductor

Day 7: Rest

A LOWER-/UPPER-/FULL-BODY SPLIT

Day 1: Lower-body workout: squat, hip thrust, leg press, lunge, hip abductor

Day 2: Rest/active recovery (30- to 60-min walk)

Day 3: Upper-body workout: bench chest press, bent-over row, incline dumbbell press, seated row, bicep curl, tricep pull-down

Day 4: Rest/active recovery (30- to 60-min walk)

Day 5: Rest

Day 6: Total-body workout: deadlift, overhead press, lat pull-down, pull-up, step-up

Day 7: Rest

GOT A QUESTION FOR OUR SQUAD? DM us on Instagram @womenshealthuk or email us at whfitsquad@womenshealthmag.co.uk

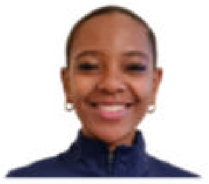
AS TOLD TO BRIDIE WILKINS. PHOTOGRAPHY: ALAMY. DIGITAL MANIPULATION: SCRATCHINPOST.CO.UK

Meet the squad

The team share the fitness supplement they swear by

Saima Husain
PT, online fitness coach
Magnesium. It supports your muscle recovery and regulates blood pressure.

Rosie Stockley
PT, prenatal and postnatal expert
Bare Biology Life & Soul Pure Omega-3 is great for energy levels.

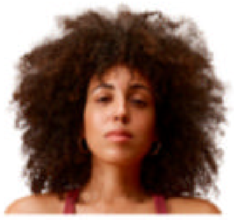


Amanda Ngonyama
Athlete, sports scientist and gymnastics coach
Chocolate protein – for the macros.

Izy George
Strength and conditioning coach, PT
Sleep! The best natural recovery supplement before anything else.

Alice Liveing
PT and bestselling author
Natural Fitness Food Vegan Protein Powder. It's delicious and convenient.

Michelle Griffith-Robinson
Olympian, life coach and PT
Pea protein powder. It helps me get more protein into my diet.



Sanchia Legister
Yoga teacher
Glucosamine. When I run long distances, it combats knee pain.

Women'sHealth

FUTURE-PROOF YOUR FITNESS
>Breathe your way to a better PB
>Game-changing recovery hacks
Women'sHealth
Fasted Cardio =Fat Loss
Were the experts wrong all along?
Frugal Fuel
15 rules for healthy shopping on a budget
It's P!nk
On health, healing and her resilience formula
RETREATS! SUPPLEMENTS! SKINCARE!
Can you really buy a better menopause?
WH INVESTIGATES
'She said my pregnancy would end in loss'
Inside the murky world of fertility psychics
MARCH 2023

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GREAT REASONS TO GET THE DIGITAL EDITION

9:41
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Infinite possibilit

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Molly Creeden
Photography
Andrew Macpherson
Styling
Kristen Saladino

ies

She was never one to shy away from a challenge, and **P!nk** is still finding new ways to push herself. At 43, she feels stronger than ever and is getting ready for a brand new tour. Warning: her nothing-is-off-limits attitude is contagious

How *should* a woman act?

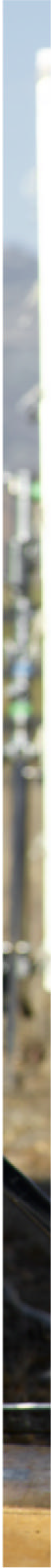
It's a question that's been asked of – and because of – P!nk for as long as she can remember. Should she be frothy and flirty, like her pop-star peers of the early 2000s? Strong, like the Williams sisters who inspire her? Irreverent, like Billie Eilish, who inspires her 11-year-old daughter? Should she make her own wine? Do 75 press-ups in one take? Fling herself in a harness over a stadium of 70,000 people?

The answer, I don't need to tell you, is that she should be however she wants to be, and that was P!nk's response long before it was cool. Twenty-three years into a career that's produced nine albums, 21 top 10 hits in the UK chart and three Grammy awards, P!nk (born Alecia Moore) has approached pop stardom with a brazen, don't-test-me energy that's surprising, in a way, because at her essence, she describes herself as 'goofy', 'cuddly' and a person who often acts out of guilt. It's at odds with the 'crazy, snarling, man-eating, righteous person' she thinks some men have her pegged as – particularly during the less-forgiving era in which she became famous. 'I was the perfect person to take all of that flak,' she says of the build-them-up-to-tear-them-down culture of the early 2000s. 'I have very thick skin. I do what I want. I can handle criticism; it doesn't move my needle. It hurts my feelings, I guess – or it used to. But it doesn't change my actions.'

P!nk is in a car being driven from a photo shoot in Los Angeles to her home north of Santa Barbara, where she moved back from LA eight years ago after a preschool application asked her to describe her daughter Willow's strengths and weaknesses and she wrote, 'She's three.' She was chided by the admissions officer, decided to leave the city and placed Willow in a school that was 'outdoorsy and muddy'. The country has been good for her family: Willow, now 11; Jameson, who is six; and her husband, former motocross racer Carey Hart. She considers the ocean and the woods healing. She knows not everyone gets the option to leave a place that isn't working for them, and she feels lucky.

'In my career, I'm around so many people with so much energy directed at me,' she says, 'and I also make noise for a living. So it's important for my mental health to unplug and be in nature.' It was that stillness that laid the groundwork for her new album, *Trustfall*, released in February. 'I had time, because of a worldwide pandemic, so I went really, really slowly,' she says, of the three years she spent making the album – a process she typically does in half the time. 'I was able to take more chances. Covid slowed down life in a "what matters" kind of way for me. Now all I want is to put things in the world that are meaningful and see my kids grow up.'

Trustfall taps into both the deep pain of feeling as if the world is falling apart and the 'f*ck it – might as well have fun' attitude that's useful when the world is falling apart. 'These



OPENING SPREAD: JACKET, ADIDAS X IVY PARK IVYTOPIA; SWIMSUIT, BEACH RIOT; TRAINERS, CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN; EARRINGS (FRONT) JENNIFER FISHER; EARRINGS (BACK), P!NK'S OWN, WORN THROUGHOUT; RINGS, ROXANNE ASSOULIN

THIS SPREAD: (LEFT PAGE) SPORTS BRA, HEROINE SPORT; BOTTOM, OYE SWIMWEAR; EARRINGS, SELINA KING; (RIGHT PAGE) BIKINI TOP, STELLA McCARTNEY; TRACK PANTS, ADIDAS X IVY PARK IVYTOPIA; EARRINGS, ALEXIS BITTAR; RING, JENNY BIRD

'We're always on the lookout for cool new things that you might not die from'

CREDITS GO HERE

two opposition forces somehow meet and balance each other out,' says P!nk, of electric and synthy tracks that live alongside ballads. *When I Get There*, for example – a love letter to someone who has passed, written by David Hodges and Amy Wadge – left this writer weeping into her keyboard.

'I'm sorry, it's a hard first listen,' P!nk says. 'I was the same when I first heard that song.' Her voice gets quieter. 'Um, I lost my dad in August of 2021. He had cancer for eight years. When that song was sent to me, I was very numb. I don't grieve in a normal way, like how I see other people grieve. They have such instant access to their grief, it seems. I just kind of go numb. It takes me a really long time to unpack that suitcase, and that song was part of the unpacking. I heard it and I thought, "That's my song."'

The past few years have been marked by loss – her father, and with him, a complicated relationship ('My

BANDEAU, SHORTS AND CAPE, ALL VICTOR GLEMAUD; TRAINERS, ZARA; EARRINGS, GEORG JENSEN

work now is to remember all of the good things, because I know sometimes I have a tendency to remember the bad shit. I want to try to hold on to the good; there was a lot of good'), fractious politics, friends who lost parents to Covid, and 'just all of this stuff'.

'I kind of feel like we were walking around with this low-level trauma that some of us were aware of and some of us weren't,' she says. One of the hardest losses was her family's nanny, Trish, to cancer. 'She was one of the loves of our life,' says P!nk. She thought about how to facilitate her kids' closure around the relationship, which was helped by the fact that Trish told them she would be their angel. 'And so my youngest...' P!nk pauses. 'Talking about this makes me cry. Jameson will walk around the kitchen and go, "Hey, Grandpa, hey, Trish."' On a hike in the middle of a hailstorm, P!nk could hear Jameson talking to his angel: 'Trish, I know you're up there. You've got to make the wind stop!'

While the process of creating the album was sometimes heavy, the tour on which P!nk embarks this summer is a technicolour spectacle. 'It's a festival and a lovefest,' she says of the show, called Summer Carnival, which visits stadiums throughout North America and Europe. 'I'm kind of like a circus act.' P!nk has become known for her aerial performances and acrobatics – ballet suspended in the air on silks, flips and spins and somersaults in a harness while flying through a stadium. 'It's exhilarating,' P!nk says. 'Every performance I get to do new things, so I'm always trying to top it. And it's going to start getting really hard to do that because I've done the craziest stuff. But we're always on the lookout for cool new things that you might not die from.'

'What's it like up there?' I ask her, of flying over everyone at 40ft per second, and P!nk responds with the split brain of a working parent. 'I start at the end of the stage and I'm thinking, "When did Willow last have her cold medicine?" and I think, "I might be sad." Then I get thrown on to an apparatus and I'm like, "Ahh! I'm not sad any more!" It's awesome.'

To perform her highly physical show hundreds of times, P!nk is rigorous about keeping her body strong – particularly her core. She taught herself to sing and soar at the same time by hanging upside down and belting out songs while balls were thrown at her stomach. On tour, she works out three times a day – once in the morning, once in the afternoon and 'two hours of pure, psychotic cardio at night' onstage. But the workouts invigorate her. 'I have so much energy,' she says.

Back on her farm in southern California, P!nk works out every day – a diligence she credits to growing up in a military family and competing in gymnastics. 'I like being strong,' she says. 'I identify with my core, my intuition and my strength. I have big, wide feet and I joke, "The better to kick you with." I'm short, close to the ground, fast and agile.' P!nk has trained with Jeanette Jenkins since Willow's birth and throughout the week, the pop star likes to alternate her workout sessions between cardio HIIT, strength training with body weight and dumbbells, yoga, Pilates, cardio kick-boxing, cardio sculpting with medium and light weights and core-specific routines.

These workouts – which she typically does through Jenkins' online portal – are often tailored to an upcoming performance. For the 2017 American Music Awards, for example, where P!nk danced and sang horizontally on the side of a building, Jenkins focused on side and wall planks. When she's gearing up for a silks performance where P!nk might be doing splits, Jenkins integrates more yoga and Pilates, as well as reps that push and pull body weight. The trainer puts emphasis on strength workouts that ensure P!nk's joints are solid, to ensure that

LEFT PAGE: HOODED BODYSUIT, ALAÏA AT MYTHERESA; RING, GEORG JENSEN

RIGHT PAGE: HOODED BODYSUIT, ALAÏA AT MYTHERESA; TRAINERS, JIMMY CHOO; EARRINGS, TOHUM; SUNGLASSES, FENDI; RING, ALEXIS BITTAR

HAIR: PAMELA NEAL FOR EXCLUSIVE ARTISTS. MAKE-UP: KATHY JEUNG AT FORWARD ARTISTS USING ARMANI BEAUTY AND ELEMENT EIGHT. MANICURE: JOLENE BRODEUR AT THE WALL GROUP

she doesn't get injured. Sometimes P!nk does Peloton, where, 'Cody Rigsby tells me to get my life together, and I listen.' She loves her strength; she's the strongest she's ever been. 'I could pick up a car if I needed to,' she says.

Last year, she gave her body a gift. She was coming off hip and double disc replacement surgery in her back. She'd eaten a lot of sourdough during the pandemic and her joints responded poorly to the weight gain. 'I was probably a bit depressed from all of the loss,' she says, 'and I couldn't lose weight to save my life. I would work out three hours a day, eat clean, and my metabolism was a dud – I couldn't get anything started. And I was like, "I'm exhausted, I'm sad, I haven't been away from my family for three years – not even overnight. And I just need a minute."' P!nk signed up for a two-week programme at SHA Wellness Clinic in Alicante, Spain, where she adhered to the Kushi diet – an anti-inflammatory plan rich in vegetables, beans and whole grains. Before every meal, she drank apple cider vinegar mixed with water and refrained from drinking while eating. The thinking, according to the regimen, is that the body absorbs nutrients more effectively and feels sated if liquid doesn't interfere.

'It was the longest I've ever been away from my kids and the biggest gift I've ever given myself,' she says. 'I did it for me, which in turn would be for them.' P!nk lost weight during the programme and began to get back to feeling like herself. That process continued at home, where she adhered to many of the Kushi principles, including eating miso soup for breakfast. (She also returned to eating string cheese – along with the fish, salads and scrambled eggs with spinach that are staples in her diet.) The shift she felt after her time at SHA was due to more than nutrition. 'I got rest. I wasn't getting rest before. I slept in a bed by myself for the first time in 11 years. I had time to meditate and cry and journal.'

Famous for decades, with a reputation for keeping it real, P!nk did not slip in and out of the spa. The subject matter she touches on in her music – beginning with 2002's *Family Portrait* ('Can we work it out? / Can we be a family?') – resonates so deeply with people that they approach her for advice. When she was younger, she didn't know what to say; now, she leans in. 'People come to me for family therapy,' she says, while recounting a story of a father at SHA who asked her to talk to his daughter who seemed lost. She was happy to oblige. 'It was nice until he started waiting outside of my room, insisting that I sit down with his wife. I was like, "Bro, I'm here to heal, this is not [US health and wellness drama] *Nine Perfect Strangers*."'

Maybe that overfamiliarity is the ultimate cost of having a long career in an industry in which sticking around for decades is unusual. 'I guess I don't see limits,' P!nk says, when I ask how she plans to continue challenging herself. 'I don't see the end of the road as the end of the road. I just see it as a place to start building. And I bite off more than I can chew, and I...' she laughs, 'ferociously attack life. I feel like when the going gets tough, that's when you dig deeper and double down. And I'm constantly saying, "What will I do with this one precious life?" I'm gonna do too much. I'm gonna slide in sideways until the end, going, 'Holy sh*t, did you see that!?' WH

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goal
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Words: Amy
Marturana Winderl

Factor in food
and exercise
to reach the
right level

Sugar rush

Health and fitness fanatics are biohacking blood glucose to optimise energy, performance and more. But at what cost?

PHOTOGRAPHY: CLAIRE BENOIST/THE LICENSING PROJECT; GETTY IMAGES

One woman's health-saving device is another woman's... lifestyle tracker? That's the tricky question at the heart of the rising interest in glucose monitoring for active, healthy people. As the main sugar found in our blood, glucose is a big deal – it's our chief source of energy. So it's no surprise that several start-ups are advocating for the need to keep tabs on this health marker to boost energy, optimise workouts and more.

With this new focus on glucose comes the promotion of continuous glucose monitor (CGM) devices, making them seem just another trendy tool. But experts and people with diabetes have reservations about watching blood sugar levels around the clock when you're generally healthy – and doing it with tech that other patients need to live. So how important is understanding glucose as part of overall health? And do CGMs make sense if you don't have a medical condition?

Glucose – tell me more...

When you eat or drink something that contains carbs, your body breaks it down into basic chemical components, one of which is sugar. This enters your bloodstream and is carried to cells, where it's used for energy. The process is of great interest to athletes. Muscles use glucose (a simple sugar) to power movements, says Caroline Apovian, an internist (a doctor of general internal medicine) and co-director of the Center for Weight Management and Wellness at Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston. Carb-loading before races is done because taking in sugar is the only way to increase blood glucose, and expending energy (which burns glucose) lowers it.

When you consume that carb-containing food or drink, your blood glucose level rises, says Disha Narang, an endocrinologist at Northwestern Medicine Lake Forest Hospital, Illinois. Then your pancreas releases insulin, a hormone that transports the glucose into the cells. This transfer ultimately reduces the level of sugar in your blood, bringing it back to normal.

Why do people with diabetes track their blood sugar?

Here's the deal: if you don't have diabetes, your body processes glucose and keeps levels in check. If you have diabetes – a condition that results in too much sugar in the blood – you need to regulate your levels. Type 1 diabetes is caused by a deficiency of insulin and often affects children and young adults. 'The pancreas doesn't release insulin, so you need to take it in injectable form,' says Dr Narang. Type 2 is a disease of insulin resistance and is typically connected to lifestyle. 'The pancreas produces insulin, but your tissues don't accept it,' she adds. This leaves glucose in the blood instead of reaching cells.

People with diabetes must track their blood sugar. That's done with a finger prick or devices called CGMs. They let you know if you need to eat something (to raise blood sugar) or inject insulin (to decrease it). It's an ongoing dance for those who need to monitor, which is primarily people with type 1 (when there's no insulin production from the pancreas, they have to know glucose data to decide how much insulin to inject – unlike with type 2, in which the pancreas is able to produce it). This is why doctors and patients have strong feelings about the issue of CGMs.

Should the rest of us track our blood sugar?

You'll be hard-pressed to find a doctor who deems it necessary for you to regularly tune in to your glucose levels unless you have to do so for medical reasons. The experts we spoke with for this piece told us that if you don't have diabetes, a risk of developing it, or the gestational type (develops during pregnancy), constantly

What's normal? When you're fasted (say, after a night's sleep), a blood sugar level of 72-99mg/dL is healthy. One to two hours post-meal, less than 140mg/dL is normal. A level outside these ranges is a sign of pre-diabetes. You won't know your exact level unless you test. For the average person, it's safe to assume everything is fine unless you have symptoms, such as excessive thirst, frequent urination, unintended weight loss, fatigue or constant hunger. If that's the case, talk to your GP.

CGMs, explained

A continuous glucose monitor is a device that is attached to the skin and reads glucose levels every few minutes, day and night. For people with diabetes, CGMs are a game changer.

'They help us work out if insulin is appropriate and help patients dose their insulin properly,' says Dr Narang. CGMs are valuable, even life-saving, for this group of people. But while they're available on the NHS to some diabetes patients in the UK, they're not always covered by health insurance in the US, and a higher demand can mean increased prices for those who truly need them.

There's also the issue of accuracy. Even the devices that people with diabetes rely on are not 100% accurate and typically show much more variance at lower (normal) blood sugars, adds Dr Narang.

tracking your blood sugar levels is pointless at best.

Your body knows how to adjust when blood sugar goes up and down with each meal and workout. With a device, 'you watch your body do what it's supposed to do – and then you don't need to do anything differently', Dr Apovian points out. When researchers analysed data from monitors used by 153 people without diabetes, they concluded that 96% of the readings were in the normal range*. And another study*, which addressed the increased marketing of CGMs, concluded there's no evidence that people with normal glucose responses benefit from tracking. Also, what you learn won't be surprising: when you eat fruit, your blood sugar goes up. When you eat salad, it won't spike as much.

Measuring costs around £170 per month for CGM equipment and app access if you don't have diabetes (they're free for diabetes type 1 patients on the NHS) and many medical professionals worry the casual monitoring may affect mental health. 'I've had people buy them and contact me, alarmed because they ate pasta and their blood sugar rose,' says Dr Narang. 'But everyone's blood sugar rises when they eat carbs.' This way of thinking has pushed people to unnecessarily cut back on carbs and embark on restrictive dieting that's not sustainable, she adds. ➜

*SOURCES: *JOURNAL OF CLINICAL ENDOCRINOLOGY AND METABOLISM*; *JAMA*

The bottom line

If you want to feel like you're in the driver's seat with your glucose fluctuations, there are easier ways – and ones you're probably already doing. Eat a balanced diet, with plenty of fruit and vegetables. Think about pairing lean protein with whole grains at each meal and with each snack, which helps slow down the release of sugar into your bloodstream. Cut back on processed sweets. Exercise regularly (at least 30 minutes, five times per week, per NHS guidance) and sleep at least seven hours a night.

When you notice a swing in mood or energy after you haven't eaten for a while, that's probably low blood sugar nudging you to have a snack. There's no need to know your exact glucose reading, though; simply eating something will give your body what it needs to self-regulate.

The bottom line? You know what's best for you – such as whether you enjoy body and health data, can maintain a healthy relationship with wearables and stats, and have the means to invest in new tools and tech. But know that if you focus on a dietary plan low in processed foods and refined carbs, your body is structured to manage these hormones on its own, adds Dr Narang. Have a little faith – your body's got this. WH

Sugar sensors Specially trained pooches can sniff out blood sugar issues before they turn into a medical emergency. Diabetic service dogs are taught to smell specific compounds released by the body when someone with type 1 or insulin-dependent type 2 has dangerous changes to their blood sugar. They're particularly useful for detecting hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar), says Dr Apovian.

Yes, carbs raise blood sugar – and it's totally normal

Welcome to the fed state fan club

From weight loss to endurance, the benefits of not munching before movement have been drilled into us for years. But as research calls this idea into question, is it time we debunked the fasted-state fallacy?

WORDS: CHLOE GRAY

PHOTOGRAPHY: ALAMY; GETTY IMAGES; STUDIO 33 (TRAINER); ROWAN FEE (DONUT AND WEIGHTS)

For many, it's down to logistics – anyone who can find the time to eat a protein-rich meal before a 7am date with the squat rack has more hours in the day than we do. For others, the idea of eating *anything* before the email inbox is in full, incessant flow is as nauseating as burpees on a hangover. Meanwhile, those of us who show up for exercise with fat burn in mind can console ourselves with the idea that nothing torches calories quite like a fasted workout. Or does it?

If new research is to be believed, forgoing that pre-training toast may not be the boon you think it is. A 2022 study found motivation and energy levels before exercise were lower when participants were in a fasted state, while those doing fasted workouts performed worse and enjoyed workouts less than their fed peers. It's the latest study to challenge the idea that exercising on an empty stomach is superior to being in a fed state; in fact, researchers have been questioning this received wisdom for decades. So where should you land on the fasted/fed debate?

FAST AND THE CURIOUS

Before you pick a side, let's be clear on the meaning. 'Being "fed" refers to your metabolic state after eating food, when the body is digesting and absorbing the nutrients,' explains Renee McGregor, leading sports dietitian and Women's Health Collective panellist. She notes that this state typically lasts for up to four hours after eating, although it could last for up to six, depending on the speed of your metabolism and what you've eaten – high-fat or fibrous food, such as whole grains, red meat and seeds will take longer to digest than simple carbohydrates.

As such, when you wake up in the morning after an (ideally) eight-hour slumber, you're probably in the opposite state: fasted. 'What you eat the night before will always influence your energy the following day, but it won't be available as direct fuel because your body will have broken it down and used it for energy,' adds McGregor, dispelling the belief that a bowl of pasta at 7pm will have fully 'carb loaded' you for the morning. It's not just a dawn chorus scenario, either; eating your first meal at noon and hitting the gym at 6pm will also land you in a fasted state.

Until now, most people found themselves firmly on one side of the fence – Team Fasted if they wanted to burn fat, and Team Fed if they wanted to crank up their training, thanks to the performance benefits of the extra fuel they have taken in. 'When you work out in the fed state, your body uses the calories consumed as a form of energy,' says sports dietitian Jenaed Brodell, founder of the nutrition consultancy company Nutrition and Co. 'That can maximise performance, helping you work harder and for longer, while also repairing muscle damage post-workout.' Being in a 'fed state' fuels your brain and nervous system, too, adds McGregor. Not only will you feel more alert, you'll also make

Dough with the flow

faster, better decisions, giving you a vital edge if you're an athlete.

So far, so Team Fed. But here's where it gets a bit murky: headlines touting the benefits of fasted-state training aren't completely wrong. There's been plenty of research proving the positives associated with working out on an empty stomach, from an increase in VO_2 max to a ramped-up metabolism. A 2019 study from the University of Bath concluded that exercising before breakfast improves blood sugar control, while a 2020 paper published in the *Nutrients* journal found that less muscle protein breakdown occurred in those who ate after strength training than in those who ate beforehand.

The disclaimer? These studies were conducted on men – as 97% of sports science research is*. Compare it with the tiny number of studies looking at the impact of feeding in women and the differences are significant. Case in point: a study from the University of Surrey and St George's University, which compared the performance of men and women during a 30-minute treadmill run at 70% of their max speed. The results showed that while male participants benefited from waiting until after the session to eat, women burned more fat both during the workout and at rest for the remainder of the day when they consumed food before exercise.

Being in a 'fed state' fuels your brain

Adding weight to the female-fed state is hormonal health. Take the stress hormone

SOURCES: * INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SPORTS NUTRITION AND EXERCISE METABOLISM; OUTSIDE

Jordan
5kg
11lb

Get into gear with smart fuelling

cortisol – levels of which have been elevated of late thanks to a pandemic, a cost of living crisis and a revolving door at Downing Street. Indeed, more than half of women reported higher stress levels in 2022 than in 2021, according to a survey by professional services firm Deloitte. What's more, McGregor explains, women are more sensitive to stress hormones as a result of our reproductive cycles. But fed-state training could be a key weapon in your anti-stress arsenal. 'In the morning, your cortisol levels naturally spike. Layering that with something that causes a greater increase in stress hormones, such as a high-intensity session, will make cortisol levels rise and stay high throughout the day.' In contrast, eat before and you can reduce that spike during the session and throughout the day, with one small 2015 study* finding that 400 calories of food before a treadmill run reduced circulating cortisol levels after training by 36% compared with when participants trained fasted. 'It's a multifaceted subject,' adds McGregor. 'But fuelling properly is a key factor that underpins how women's cycles work.'

NUTRIENT CYCLING

Should you still need convincing that the workout fast is best left in the past, let's talk about periods. While a fasted workout, in isolation, is unlikely to affect them, train on an empty stomach on a regular basis and your cycle will notice. 'In women, a lack of carbs is linked with a blunting of the production of the thyroid hormone T3,' explains McGregor. 'That, layered with the excess cortisol, signals to the hypothalamus – the hormone centre in the brain – that the body is in a state of stress, which leads to non-essential systems, such as the reproductive system and, therefore, the menstrual cycle, to be downregulated.' While period loss (amenorrhoea) is an extreme outcome of excessive fasted training, it's more common than you might expect and the health implications are serious. '[Amenorrhoea] can reduce your bone density, impact cognitive function, impair balance, cause your athletic performance to deteriorate and reduce lean muscle mass gains,' warns McGregor.

It isn't just cortisol that's affected, either. A study published in the

SOURCE: *JOURNAL OF PHYSICAL THERAPY SCIENCE journal *PLOS One* found that fasting decreases the production of kisspeptin. 'This is a neuropeptide responsible for sex hormones and endocrine and reproductive function,' explains female physiology expert Stacy Sims. 'It also plays a significant role in maintaining healthy glucose levels, appetite regulation and body composition.' A hit to kisspeptin will disrupt the release of oestrogen and progesterone – the two key female reproductive hormones. 'Women have double the amount of kisspeptin in their brains than men, which explains why women have a greater sensitivity to changes in their energy balance,' explains Dr Sims. 'This energy balance is disrupted through fasted cardio, as your brain perceives a deficiency in nutrients.' Add exercise into the equation and you'll only exacerbate your hormonal imbalance, adds Dr Sims. Clearly, it's a vicious cycle, but here's the irony: a disrupted metabolism from low thyroid and high cortisol is also associated with 'your body storing more belly fat and with weight gain', says Dr Sims, so if you're working out fasted to burn fat, your efforts won't be rewarded.

FED UP

We'll assume that, at this point, you're a member of Team Fed. So how do you turbo-charge your gym routine? Research shows eating before exercise boosts endurance, especially in sessions over an hour, but intensity matters more than type of workout, says Brodell. 'At low intensities, eating first is less important, as your body usually has enough fat stores to fuel the activity. But by getting the right pre-workout nutrition, you can maximise your performance while also repairing muscle damage post-workout.'

If the thought of doing egg burps on your Peloton is enough to make you turn green, we hear you. Eating too much can cause mid-workout sickness because, during exercise, your body moves blood flow away from your digestive system, halting the movement of food through your gut, to get oxygenated blood to the muscles you're using. But fuelling before your sessions doesn't have to be nauseating. 'At high intensities, your body's primary fuel source is carbohydrates, so it's especially important to have a carb-rich food source before training,' says Brodell, adding that simple foods such as a banana, which can be quickly turned into fuel, are particularly useful.

Still can't stomach a pre-sesh snack? Start small, says McGregor. 'You can train your gut to be able to handle food in the morning and before exercise. The key is to start eating low amounts and gradually increase the portion size.' McGregor recommends aiming for 0.5g to 1g of carbs per kilogram of body weight, eaten up to three hours – or at least 30 minutes – before working out. For a 70kg woman, that's 35g to 70g of carbs before a fast or long run, HIIT session or heavy strength day. To avoid muscle breakdown, Dr Sims recommends adding 15g of protein to your pre-workout snack, too, with easy and low-fat protein sources being your best option – think yoghurt, protein powder or a glass of soya milk.

Still Team Fasted? You do you. There are no hard and fast rules about how and when to eat and train, and your daily calorie intake, activity levels and stress will all influence how well you tolerate fasted training. If you eat enough throughout the rest of the day to recover well, it's all good, says McGregor, with this caveat: 'Try not to do more than two fasted sessions a week to avoid layering day after day of high cortisol levels. Those sessions should also be less than an hour long and at a pace that allows you to talk – a yoga session or light jog, for example.' Feeling stressed, dealing with fatigue or hormone dysregulation? You're better off leaving fasted training at the door. And if you're planning an intense session first thing, a carb-rich snack will support your workout and your hormonal health. As McGregor puts it, 'A nourished body is a healthy body.' If eating rice cakes slathered in peanut butter could be the difference between a stressed-out body and a happy state of mind, crunch away, we say.

You can train your gut to handle food in the morning

Fed-state feeds

One to three hours before training:

'These small meals contain a good serving of carbs and protein, while being low in fat and fibre, so you'll digest them at pace pre-workout,' says dietitian Jenaed Brodell.

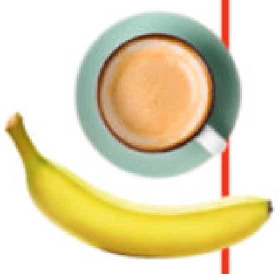
Two rice cakes with cottage cheese

Fruit smoothie with one banana, a handful of berries and 150ml of yoghurt, milk or soya milk

40g of granola (with some sugar content for a pre-workout energy spike) served with 150ml of milk

Less than an hour before working out:

'These snacks are easy to grab and go, and deliver 30g to 60g of simple carbohydrates for fast energy,' says Brodell.



A milky coffee and a banana

Two medjool dates with a teaspoon of peanut butter

Ready, set, prep

Chop chop

If your food processor is gathering dust, consider this your cheat sheet to help you whip up dips, slaws and more

BUT I HAVE A BLENDER...
Use it for smoothies and soups, or anything with a lot of liquid. But to chop, shred or slice, the food processor is the way to go.

Puttin' on the blitz

Blade breakdown

Slicing disc

If you're staring down a pile of fruit and veg, use this round accessory, which gets placed on the top of the bowl and is the fastest way to get thin slices of fruit and veg for salads, crudites and sautes. Your machine may have different sizes or a dicing adaptor, so you can vary the thickness and shape.

S-blade

This one will get you through most average jobs, from chopping up onions (without tears) to churning out a pesto in seconds. The pulse button gives you control of how long the blades spin, so you can be sure the food's evenly cut up. Or let the machine run to puree what's inside.

Shredding disc

Save your knuckles from the perils of the box grater or zester. Grab this handy attachment (it sits on top of the bowl) to painlessly and quickly pulverise a block of cheese (which should be cold and cut into smaller chunks first).

Get to work

'Rice' vegetables

Throw broccoli or cauliflower florets (and stems) into the bowl and give it a few pulses to chop them into tiny pieces.

DIY oat flour

Make your own gluten-free, fibre-rich flour by processing rolled oats until they become a fine powder.

Make 'ice cream'

Transform frozen mangos or bananas into a dessert with the press of a button. Once smooth, pulse in your favourite add-ons.

Whip up dips

For a crowd-pleaser, process tinned beans with oil and your go-to seasonings (ours: garlic, herbs and a splash of lemon juice).

Blitz up nut butter

Pulse roasted nuts to roughly chop, then process until smooth and creamy (be patient, it can take up to 15 minutes).

PHOTOGRAPHY: NICO SCHINCO. FOOD STYLING: REBECCA JURKEVICH. PROP STYLING: MAEVE SHERIDAN

Food in a flash

After hours oats

Turn your morning bowl into an evening feast with a savoury base and tons of toppings. Most important meal of the day, take two

Savoury oats with greens and eggs

Total: **20 mins** Serves: **4**

2 tbsp **olive oil**
1 tsp grated **ginger**
140g **baby kale**
4 tsp **vegetable bouillon powder**
160g **rolled oats**
1 tsp **toasted sesame oil**
4 **soft-boiled eggs,** halved
Sesame seeds, toasted, **nori strips** and **spring onions,** sliced, to serve

Method

01. Heat the oil in a large saucepan over a medium heat. Add the ginger and cook, stirring often, until fragrant, about 1 min. Add the kale, season with ¼ tsp salt and cook, stirring occasionally, just to wilt for 2 mins; transfer to a bowl and discard any liquid from the pan.

02. Add 950ml water and the bouillon powder to the same saucepan and bring to a boil. Stir in the oats and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the oats are tender and thickened, about 6 to 10 mins. Fold in the sesame oil.

03. Spoon the oats into bowls and serve topped with kale and eggs, then sprinkle with sesame seeds, nori strips and sliced spring onions if that's what you fancy.

Per serving: **312** cals, **30g** carbs,**13g** protein, **16g** fat WH

PHOTOGRAPHY: NICO SCHINCO. FOOD STYLING: REBECCA JURKEVICH. PROP STYLING: MAEVE SHERIDAN

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Mystic egg

Is your future looking fertile?

For women desperately trying to conceive, there's no information more valuable than the knowledge of when and how their longed-for baby will arrive. It's this very vulnerability that fertility psychics are tapping into. *WH* reports on an emerging industry

WORDS: LAUREN CROSBY MEDLICOTT

PHOTOGRAPHY: STOCKSY; GETTY IMAGES. *SOURCES: *JMIR MENTAL HEALTH*

'I felt empty... desperate.' It was April 2021, and Charlotte Crowder was inconsolable after her son, Jack, was stillborn at 28 weeks. Compounding her grief was a creeping sense that, at 35, the time she had to conceive again was, if not running out, then running low. Shattered by the death of her baby, Charlotte craved clarity; she needed someone, anyone, to tell her that she would have her longed-for child. It was a feeling that led her to digital forums. And in the weeks and months following Jack's death, she spent hours scrolling through infertility, miscarriage and baby loss groups in search of answers until, one day, she found what she was looking for. She was on Facebook when her eyes settled on an advert for a fertility reading, offered by a psychic. A few days later, she saw it again. The idea burrowed inside her mind until, curiosity piqued, she contacted the woman to ask for a reading.

What does the cup of destiny hold for you?

'I just wanted reassurance that I would bring home a living baby some day,' the 36-year-old stay-at-home mum from Southampton tells *WH*. Reflecting on that time now – a period she describes as the darkest, most vulnerable moment of her life – Charlotte can't believe she ever considered contacting a psychic. Despite considering herself to be 'open' to spirituality, she insists that she never would have done so had she have been in her normal state of mind. What made her click, she says, is a feeling that the advert was speaking directly to her.

Charlotte's response isn't just understandable, it's becoming an increasingly common one. Over the past year, business has been booming for psychics offering online fertility readings, with adverts popping up on social media as well as e-commerce sites such as Etsy; many promising to help women who are struggling with baby loss and infertility. Last year, one fertility psychic hit the headlines when she revealed to news outlets that she makes up to £10k a month predicting when women will fall pregnant, as well as what gender their baby will be. Meanwhile, astrology apps are serving up adverts in which women are given a date and gender for their unborn child. For some, the existence of fertility psychics is a logical conclusion to the burgeoning spirituality industry that's experienced an uplift in the wake of the pandemic. For others, it's a gross exploitation of women at a time when they're at their most

> **If you’re a woman who hopes to have a child some day, you’re a target**

vulnerable. Regardless of which side of the fence you’re on, if you’re a woman who hopes to have a child some day, you’re a target. So how can you navigate this space without compromising your wellbeing?

Fertile ground

While it might sound a bit ‘woo’ to some, it’s not hard to see why an emotional insurance plan – or the illusion of one – might be appealing. Take the spiralling cost of fertility treatment. Research from IVF insurance provider Gaia found that, on average, people in the UK pay around £13,730 for their IVF treatment – the equivalent of 44% of the median British household income. And as the cost of living crisis continues to bite, the stakes feel higher than ever. Whether your life savings are on the line or you’ve lived through loss, vulnerability represents a commercial opportunity, says Natalie Masson, a fertility coach and clinical psychologist. ‘It is so common when dealing with things that are outside our control to want to believe that someone out there has answers for us. And being in a vulnerable state can lead someone to make choices they might not otherwise make. I see many people so desperate that they pour money into all different kinds of services and consultations.’

The rise in fertility readings also aligns with the broader search for clarity after a tumultuous few years, says Elena Touroni, a consultant psychologist and co-founder of The Chelsea Psychology Clinic. ‘During the pandemic, we were all faced with a situation very much outside of our control,’ she explains. ‘We don’t usually have to face this kind of unpredictability head on, and in these types of situations, you might find yourself trying to predict aspects of the future you’re feeling anxious about or particularly invested in.’ Indeed, it’s not just infertility psychics who are seeing a rise in demand; spirituality as an industry is booming. ‘Since 2018, there’s been a huge increase in interest and acceptance of witchcraft and tarot,’ says Emma Carney, a witch and tarot card reader at the spirituality platform Digital Coven, who adds that the pandemic only served to turbocharge the trend.

Money for old hope

And yet, there is a sense among some that, regardless of where you stand on the psychic industry in general, some topics, such as fertility, should be off limits. And Carney is among them. ‘My stance is not to do those sorts of readings if there are fertility issues at play, and this is quite a common stance for more modern practitioners,’ she says. ‘Fertility journeys can be some of the loneliest and most emotive experiences someone can go on. It makes me very uncomfortable to hear that others do them who aren’t specialists in [the fertility] field. It’s almost like profiting from trauma.’

This sentiment of profiteering is one Charlotte can relate to. Responding to her query, the first thing the fertility psychic typed was that payment could be made via bank transfer or PayPal. A reading would normally cost £11, but the appointment would be fast-tracked if Charlotte doubled the payment. She promptly transferred £21 and, that evening, settled down on the sofa with her phone. ‘She asked me for my age, what I wanted to know and if I was pregnant or trying to conceive,’ she recalls. ‘Then, when I replied, she asked me how long we’d been trying.’ It was the latter question that gave Charlotte pause and she questioned whether these are the types of things a psychic should already know. ‘I’m a psychic not a mind reader,’ the woman replied, before offering to give her a refund.

Guilt-ridden by the curt response, Charlotte apologised, and the psychic agreed to ‘have a look’. ‘She told me there was a little boy to come, that June was important, and I’d be three weeks pregnant when I found out,’ she recalls. ‘She also predicted I’d feel unwell, be closely monitored and may have an early delivery.’ But when her enquiry after Jack was met with a reply that the psychic simply felt ‘a sense of peace’, Charlotte became angry. Once again, the psychic defended herself and, amid a string of accusatory messages, arranged a refund. ‘Don’t ask for a reading from a genuine psychic if all you want is to be told what you want to hear,’ the psychic typed before ending the chat. ‘I was already feeling overwhelming pain,' adds Charlotte. 'But the fact that I didn't get what I was looking for left me feeling even worse – and like an idiot for trying it in the first place.'

Crystal gall

Compounding the sense that those claiming to predict your childbearing future could be profiting from trauma is the fact that some in the industry are actively targeting those for whom such information is particularly valuable. In recent years, Bex Gunn has caught several people offering their psychic services on the forums of The Worst Girl Gang Ever, the support platform she runs for those affected by miscarriage and baby loss. 'When women open up regarding their loss in a post on our support groups, often someone will comment with details on tarot readings,' she reveals, adding that they tend to target the most vulnerable stories. Gunn has found psychics posing as mothers, answering the questions required in order to gain access to the group and its members before advertising their services as soon as they're admitted. 'We've had to change our settings and approve everyone's posts before they're published in order to combat this, which is a shame. It means genuine members have to wait for approval before they can get the support they need.'

Such predatory tactics haven't gone unnoticed. After miscarrying in May 2022, Hollie-Anne Brooks sought support from various groups on Facebook. 'I started noticing comments on posts subtly implying they were fertility psychics who could help,' recalls the 33-year-old journalist from Suffolk. 'I reported them as spam, but they were really convincing. They'd share stories in order to suck you in and a lot of people replied to them.' After sharing her own story for the first time, Hollie-Anne found herself on the receiving end of similar offers. 'They commented saying they could tell me when I was going to have a baby; that they could help change things for me.' While she met such messages with silence, she can see

Is it all in the cards?

VI
FERTILITY

why some women are tempted. 'You're desperate, looking for answers. It's honestly the most vulnerable position of your life.'

Even those who think they're immune to such tactics can be targeted; not by humans, but by algorithms. 'Social media platforms operate in a similar way to websites when it comes to online tracking,' says Jaya Baloo, former chief information security officer at the antivirus software company Avast. 'They use cookies and other tracking methods to follow you online and gather insights into your behaviour and interests in order to serve you more relevant ads. Armed with this data, they then try to sell you more relevant products and services.' And with recent research from Avast showing nearly half of Brits are unaware their browsing history can be seen by third parties, it's unlikely they'll have the right software to stop it being used against them on their fertility journey.

Negative result

If you are in the market for hope right now, only you can know what's right for you. And if the thought of a reading brings you comfort during a testing time, then by all means look into it. But do so in the knowledge that it could leave you in an even darker place. While researching this feature, *WH* came across countless cautionary tales from women on infertility forums, some of whom had paid hundreds of pounds for fertility readings, only for the predictions to be wrong. Some even wrote they were filled with fear after being told their baby wouldn't live. 'I had one yesterday as [I'm] pregnant and wanted to know if I was going to have a healthy pregnancy,' one expectant mother wrote on a Mumsnet forum on baby loss and infertility. 'She told me this pregnancy will end in a loss, and now I am so scared.' This outcome is something Gunn works hard to avoid on her own forum. 'The impossible truth is that no one has those answers, and to take money from these women in this traumatised and vulnerable state is completely unacceptable, unforgivable even,' she says.

For those who decide to proceed, our experts urge caution. 'As with any industry, there are sharks out there. Do your research and know that if it sounds too good to be true, then it is,' says Carney, who advises taking a meticulous approach to reading testimonials before you reach out. Meanwhile, Gunn urges women to ask about their potential psychic's methods. 'It's their duty to make sure women are well-supported during a vulnerable time. A responsible practitioner will support the woman through the work with strategies in place for every conceivable outcome.' Both agree that you should seek out a specialist, rather than replying to random adverts or direct messages from people claiming to be psychic. And anyone who promises to do a spell that will result in pregnancy should be blocked, immediately.

The painful reality is that not every fertility journey leads to parenthood; a reality that can feel incomprehensible when you're in the throes of trying to create or expand your family. Hollie-Anne is currently working with a therapist to help prepare her to start trying again; among the tactics she's employing to protect her mental wellbeing is taking a boundaried approach to social media – and she's feeling excited about the future. Meanwhile, shortly after her run-in with a fertility psychic, Charlotte took a pregnancy test – and it was positive. Her daughter Eleanor was delivered safely in April 2022 and is now a smiley, curious 10-month-old. The psychic was wrong about the gender and the arrival date, but Charlotte did fall pregnant as predicted. A happy coincidence? You decide.

> **'They said they could tell me when I was going to have a baby'**

Trying times

The expert guide to coping with fertility anxiety

Practise stress-reducing strategies

In what's perhaps the cruellest of ironies, stress can curb your chances of falling pregnant. And while there are few phrases quite as maddening as 'just relax', carving out time for proven cortisol-calming activities can help, says Dr Masson. Yoga, restorative breathing, meditation and self-massage have all been shown to improve mental wellbeing.

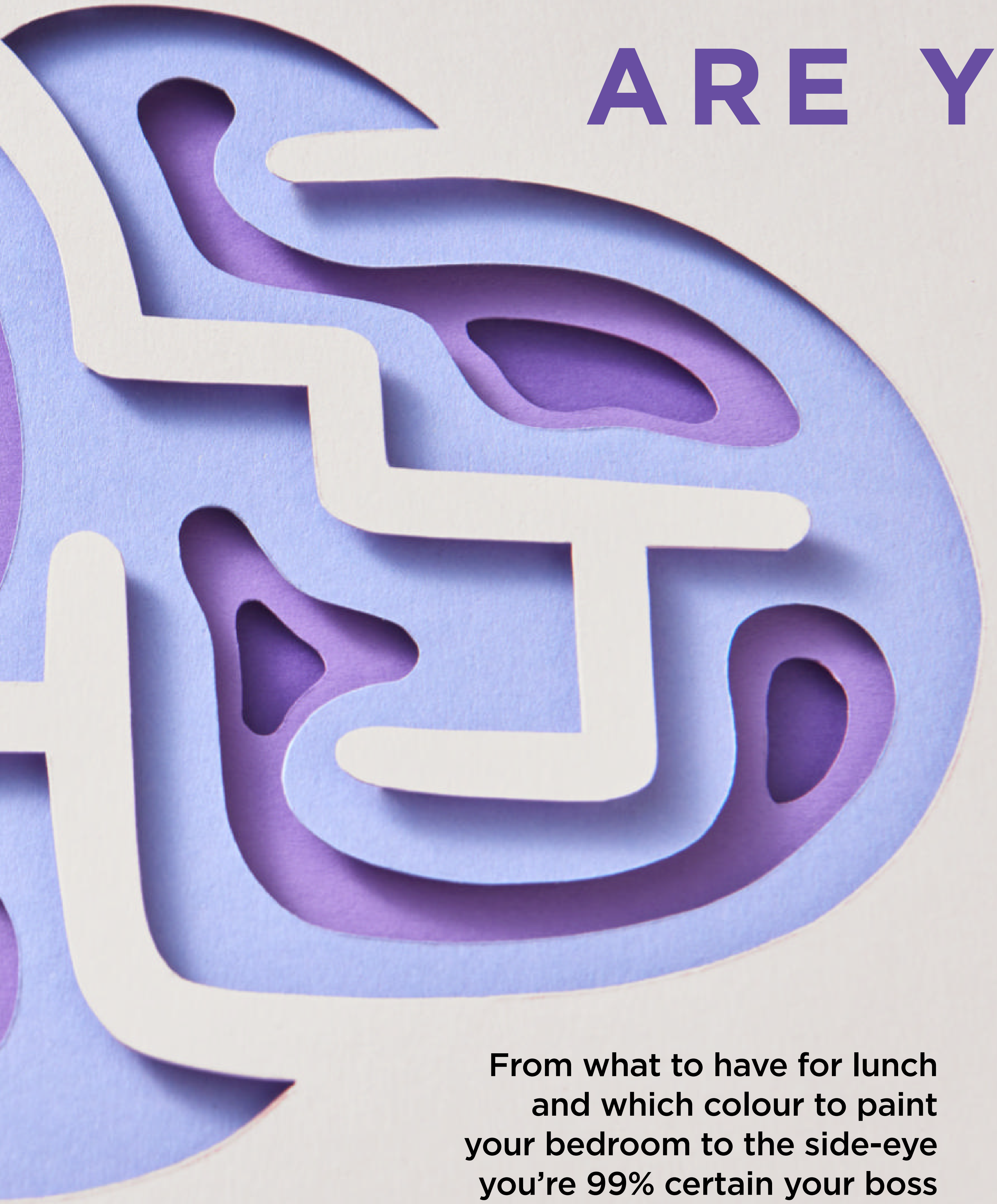
Write in a journal

Once thought of as soft self-care, journalling now has a huge amount of research behind its efficacy as a tool for processing difficult feelings. In a 2018 study* looking at journalling as an intervention for anxiety, the practice was shown to decrease mental distress and increase wellbeing over a period of 12 weeks. Try free writing (whatever's on your mind) or the CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) method and keep a 'thought diary'.

Seek support

If you need to distance yourself from pregnant friends or friends with babies for a little while, then do; if they're good friends, they'll understand. But don't leave yourself isolated. There are now more ways than ever to connect with other women and couples who get it. Go online to fertilityfriends.co.uk or join the fertility community on the app Peanut to connect with like-minded women and experts.

Paper brains?

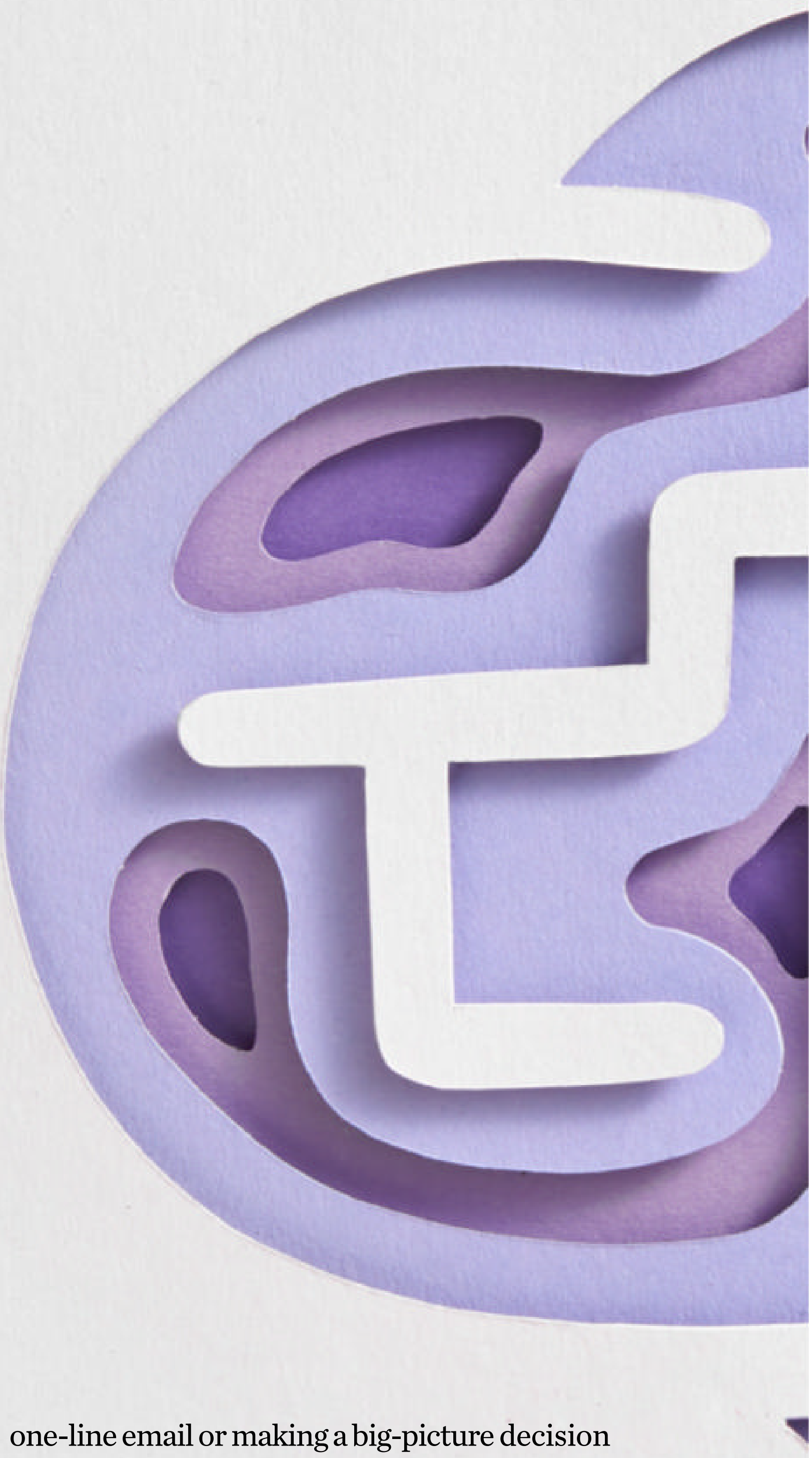


ARE YOU OVERTHINKING IT?

From what to have for lunch and which colour to paint your bedroom to the side-eye you're 99% certain your boss gave you, overthinking is an epidemic – and it's harming your health goals. Here's how to think your way out of it

WORDS: VICTORIA JOY

As Laura Andrews types her PIN into the card reader, she feels an overwhelming sense of relief. Her body relaxes, her mind clears and she breathes an audible sigh. For the first time in months, the 40-year-old creative strategist and business owner from East Yorkshire is able to see things clearly, calmly. The van salesman laughs; most customers aren't so eager to hand over their cash, he says. But Laura isn't just buying the camper van in which she and her family intend to explore the UK and make lifelong memories. She's putting an end to six months of her own incessant, exhausting deliberation. Laura is, by her own admission, an overthinker.



From Angela Chase's interior monologues in *My So-Called Life* to nearly every song on Taylor Swift's *Midnights*, it doesn't take long to land on instances of overthinking in pop culture. That the term has made its way from niche self-development vocab to meme fodder in recent years makes sense; we've had a lot to think about. Is it an easy way to communicate the overwhelming feelings that characterise the average working week in the WhatsApp age? Perhaps. But experts argue that the term is doing a lot of heavy lifting, masking a smorgasbord of psychological symptoms from irrational worry to catastrophising. So why are we all going overboard?

Mental load

For one, the term is something of an anomaly; there's no clinical definition. While it's a close cousin of the well-studied psychological concept of 'cognitive overload' – defined as experiencing too many stimuli for your brain to process at once – it's not the same thing. What the experts *WH* interviewed agree on is that it involves thinking about situations to an *unhelpful* degree. 'To put too much time into thinking about or analysing [something] in a way that is more harmful than helpful' is how the Merriam-Webster dictionary puts it, while Anne Bogel, author of *Don't Overthink It*, broadly defines it as 'times when we lavish mental energy on things that don't deserve it; thinking in a way that's repetitive, unhealthy and unhelpful'.

This rings true for Laura. 'I knew deep down that buying the van was what I wanted to do. We'd saved the money; it would be an amazing experience for our family and my husband was all in,' she says. 'But despite that, my default was to wait, to seek external approval, to have the same thoughts and questions going round in my head. "Would I live to regret it? Was this a responsible way to spend the money? Would it be safer to have the cash in the bank? What would other people think?"' Exacerbating these questions was a sense that she didn't deserve it; that the dream of freedom and family experiences should have been out of her reach. And yet... 'Since those van keys were put in my hand, I haven't second-guessed it once.'

If you've got whiplash from nodding in recognition of your own unproductive thought patterns (swap choosing a van for interpreting the true meaning behind your boss's one-line email or making a big-picture decision on having kids or not), it isn't that surprising. It doesn't feel like a stretch to suggest overthinking affects more women than men either – your WhatsApp groups (ever the scientific strategy) would probably confirm such suspicions. But the science isn't so clear-cut. 'We don't know enough to confirm a genetic difference when it comes to the brain's capacity and probability to overthink,' says Catherine Pittman, clinical psychologist, professor and co-author of *Rewire Your Anxious Brain*. Psychologist and behavioural researcher Antonius Wiehler agrees. 'In my analysis into cognitive fatigue, both genders have shown similar outcomes, so there's no data to show genetic predisposition.'

What research *has* shown is a more general gender difference in blood flow and activity in specific brain regions. A 2017 brain imaging study that compared more than 45,000 scans from nine clinics found significantly increased blood flow in the prefrontal cortex, involved with focus and impulse control, and the limbic areas of the brain, involved with mood and anxiety. Indeed, the renowned psychologist Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, author of the 2003 book *Women Who Think Too Much,* spent 20 years researching mental health, finding that

BRB, my mind is just in overdrive

women are both more likely than men to fall into overthinking and remain stuck there.

For Professor Pittman, the idea that women are more at the mercy of overthinking is due to social factors rather than neuroscience. 'The less control we feel over a situation, or life in general, the more stress we experience and the more likely we are to overthink,' she says. 'Unfortunately, women tend to have (and feel) less control over their own lives, be it because we're less likely to be decision-makers in the workplace, we're more impacted by financial insecurity via lower-paid industries, and we make up a higher percentage of primary caregivers, which involves prioritising the needs of others above our own.' Makes for dismal, if not all that surprising, reading.

Such is the case for Laura. 'I've positioned myself in our family as "the organiser, the researcher" – I do it all and carry that pressure,' she says. 'I need support, but there's also a desperate need to feel and appear independent.' Stats of the past few years highlight it's the same for many. A 2022 review in *The Lancet* concluded that women across the globe are still deemed primarily responsible for their household's unpaid labour, spending an average of three to six hours per day on chores or care work, while men contribute between 30 minutes and two hours. That's not including paid employment either; if women are so clearly bearing this brunt, is it any wonder their minds are buzzing?

Hold that thought

Consider the overlap between overthinking and that *other* trait that harms your mental health and is all too common among women, and you begin to understand why it's so pernicious. Hint: it begins with P. 'A person's tendency towards perfectionism – putting impossibly high standards on themselves – regularly manifests in overthinking, because they search for the absolute, unquestionable best option in any given situation,' says Bogel, who connected the two after speaking to countless women while researching her book. This, in turn, breeds 'analysis paralysis': a state in which you fixate on all the possible options or outcomes to such a degree that you become incapable of settling on one solution.

Marcie*, a 44-year-old primary school teacher, can relate. 'It sounds ridiculous to admit, but last winter I needed a new coat and couldn't decide which style to get,' she shares. 'I researched coats every day for months – finding one I liked, then questioning if it was worth the money or if I'd see another style I preferred. Then suddenly it was March and I'd missed the boat. I spent an entire winter feeling cold because I couldn't convince myself I'd found the *right* one.' And the negative impact runs deeper than chilly limbs. 'Overthinking such small, insignificant things has chipped away at my confidence and self-worth,' Marcie says. 'If I can't make the little decisions, how can I back myself to make the important life choices? I don't tell anyone about how much I overthink things or second-guess myself because I'm too embarrassed. It doesn't feel good.'

More worrying still, feeling crap is the least of it; experts are now warning that overthinking could be doing more insidious damage. Dr Nolen-Hoeksema's research showed that overthinking not only makes life harder, but that it has a negative impact on relationships and may even contribute to serious mental disorders including severe anxiety and substance abuse. Her study on gender differences in depression found that women were much more likely than men to say they overthink when they feel sad, anxious or depressed, but overthinking also *contributed* to women's higher rates of depression.

It can kibosh your healthy intentions, too. In a 2022 study by researchers at Pitie-Salpetriere University Hospital in Paris, researchers asked one group of participants to do automatic tasks (on autopilot) throughout the day and a second group to do tasks that required cognitive control (deliberate effort or focus). Both groups were then asked to choose between two options, thereby having to use cognitive control. 'We saw that, on average, the group who'd deployed more cognitive control throughout the day were much more likely to choose an option that provided instant gratification over that which offered a greater, but delayed, benefit,' says Dr Wiehler, who carried out the study. 'It appeared that cognitive control would fatigue over time.' It explains why spending a chunk of time thinking or acting in a way that requires focus and attention – hello, overthinking – can make you more likely to skip a workout in favour of the sofa, eat more than you need to instead of consciously pushing your plate away, and sack off self-development even when you know it'll serve future you.

Laura realised the impact of her overthinking when she started working with a client who happened to be a clarity coach. 'I was helping her with her brand strategy and the more she spoke about how feeling paralysed by every little decision and ruminating on the past could keep a person stuck, it felt as if she was describing me,' she admits. Consciously aware of her thinking patterns, she began to pay attention to when her overthinking was at its worst and realised her physical space could be a trigger. 'If the house was a mess or I hadn't been for a run outdoors in a while, it made a big difference,' she says. 'Now, if I know something's going to happen that might lead to overthinking, or I've got a decision to make, I'll set myself up properly; go for a run, have a shower, put a bit of lippy on, tidy the room I'm in. It sounds trivial, but it's a way for me to override my self-sabotaging mind.' In short, it's about creating the right conditions for your analytic brain to thrive; cognitive wellness, if you will. Now that really is something to think about.

Seeking peace, not a solution

Blue-sky thinking

Limit your options

Streamlining regular decisions can help you to establish habits that reduce overthinking. 'Routine can serve as a fatigue-busting framework,' says Bogel, who suggests having signature no-stress meals, a capsule wardrobe and setting specific device-free zones/ times to lessen overwhelming feelings.

Change the channel

'Your brain's amygdala can't distinguish between you imagining negative scenarios in the cortex of your brain and that negative situation actually playing out,' explains Professor Pittman. Cue physical sensations of stress, which draw your focus to the subject you're overthinking even more. 'If the analogy is that the amygdala is watching cortex TV, you need to change the channel – distract yourself with something else entirely – to reset,' she adds.

Make a move

It doesn't have to be a workout; it could be a walk to a local green space or dancing to a song you love – but exerting physical energy helps to break your brain circuitry and shift perspective. 'There may be some biochemical effect of activity that has a positive [impact] on mood and thinking – the release of brain chemicals such as [noradrenaline] and serotonin,' wrote Dr Nolen-Hoeksema. 'It's harder to lapse back into overthinking if you're actively moving about.'

Spot the signs

Learning how overthinking shows up in your life will help you negate it. Be aware of things like having the same tabs open on your computer for weeks on end, rereading messages more than necessary and discussing the same decision over and over. Note physical sensations, too, such as an elevated heart rate or butterflies when your mind jumps to a future scenario.

PHOTOGRAPHY: STOCKSY; GETTY IMAGES. *NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED

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Speaking my mind

‘I’d be a happier, healthier person if I wasn’t a doctor’

Doctors are significantly more likely to take their own lives than the general population. Here, one woman shares the devastating toll the profession has taken on her mental health

As a teenager, I loved science and wanted to help people in need – so training to be a doctor felt like the obvious path for me. But in my final year of medical school, when I was already working in a hospital, I had a severe depressive episode and was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. It disrupted my medical training and devastated my sense of self-worth, which has always been tied to my professional performance. I attempted suicide and was hospitalised for a week.

Today, I'm a 30-year-old anaesthetist in a busy Manchester hospital*. And I've never attempted suicide since. But in the six years I've been working as a doctor, my suicidal thoughts have regularly reappeared. I feel suicidal about once every five months, and it feels as though I start planning to end my life on a yearly basis. Of course, my bipolar diagnosis plays a part in this. But I know my capacity to deal with a mental health condition would be a hundredfold better – and I'd be a happier, healthier person – if I wasn't a doctor.

I'm far from the only doctor to struggle with suicidal thoughts; the suicide rate for my profession has been estimated at between two and five times that of the general population. Personally, I know five doctors who've made suicide attempts, including attempts that ended their lives. Like me, some doctors who feel suicidal have underlying conditions such as depression. But the job can also push you into a dark place.

When you're a doctor, your basic needs often aren't met. Shift work makes it hard to sleep, eat or exercise, and you're constantly exposed to trauma. I've treated a young person after a car accident and had to tell their parents they were brain-dead. During Covid, I called family after family, explaining their relative wasn't going to be resuscitated. I often think, 'My god, I cannot make a mistake.' I'll cope with the stress by smoking, drinking and sometimes using drugs to unwind, including cocaine, MDMA and cannabis. While I wouldn't call myself an addict, 10% to 12% of doctors are estimated to have problems with substance abuse.

Pressures on the NHS put doctors under even more strain. We want to do our best for patients, but we can't if our hospital hasn't got the resources or enough staff. It feels terrible – and for me, feeling helpless and hopeless about work can tip into feeling helpless and hopeless about life.

People might not realise I'm suicidal because I still function; I shower, I eat, I turn up to work. But I struggle with the sense that I'm fundamentally broken and things won't get better. I feel like no one can help or understand, and I often don't want to share how I'm feeling because my job requires me to be so high-functioning. I get home and think, 'Is the job worth it when it affects my mental health so much?

I don't know what else I could do, though. This is the only thing I'm good at. I'm not surprised that at least five doctors died by suicide while being investigated by the General Medical Council between 2018 and 2020. If you're a doctor facing the possibility of being struck off, your whole sense of identity is under attack.

When I experience suicidal thoughts, I try to make sure I'm prioritising sleep and food. I'm on medication and see a psychiatrist, too. I also reach out to the NHS Practitioner Health Programme, a mental health service that works with healthcare professionals. Talking things through, to someone who understands, is a lifeline.

In terms of what needs to change for doctors to feel more supported, shorter working hours would be a good start. It would also be positive if there were weekly groups where doctors could talk openly about mental wellbeing with their colleagues. But little changes won't help. NHS managers sometimes suggest that doctors just need to work on building their 'resilience'. I don't need to toughen up; things around me need to change.

> 'Doctors aren't "heroes", we're human like everyone else'

Outside the NHS, I'd ask people not to put doctors on a pedestal, and remember we can also be affected by poor mental health. Ignore the pandemic rhetoric – we're not 'heroes'; we're human, multifaceted and vulnerable like everyone else. If you have a friend or relative who works in healthcare, just be supportive. Don't only ask them about the funniest thing they've seen in A&E; ask them how they're *really* doing. Doctors need their loved ones to check in with them now more than ever.

Suicide The expert view

Dame Clare Gerada is president of the Royal College of General Practitioners and chair of Doctors in Distress, a charity aiming to reduce suicide rates among healthcare workers

What can cause suicide?

Suicide is incredibly complex, with no simple 'causation' to point to. In one analysis I did for NHS Practitioner Health, around half of doctors who took their own life had an underlying mental illness, such as anxiety, bipolar disorder and depression. But half did not. It's important to remember that suicide itself isn't necessarily a mental health problem and that suicidal feelings are temporary.

Why might doctors be more at risk of suicide?

While it's important to recognise and acknowledge the complexity of individual situations, both complaints and workload – which can cause burnout and feelings of hopelessness – may increase the risk of suicide for doctors. We can't say complaints cause suicide, but doctors who receive a formal complaint are more likely to have depression than those who don't.

What should you do if you get suicidal thoughts?

People who talk about it are less likely to end their lives than those who don't – but someone in a state of despair may not ask for help. If a loved one is struggling, remind them they're not alone and arrange regular check-ins.

dutytocare.info provides instant mental health support for NHS workers. Call Samaritans for free on 116 123 or visit samaritans.org

ILLUSTRATION: ANDREA MANZATI AT SYNERGY ART. *AGE AND LOCATION HAVE BEEN CHANGED

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Breathe like an athlete

Improving your CO_2 tolerance can help you optimise both your physical and mental performance. Is a new PB as easy as breathing in and out?

WORDS: CAITLIN CARLSON

As little as 10 minutes a day of breathwork can increase your CO_2 score

PHOTOGRAPHY: MASSIMO GAMMACURTA. PROP STYLING: ME GUMIEMOTO

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Let's try something: wherever you're reading this, sit a little taller and inhale and exhale through your nose. Now open your phone's stopwatch. At the end of your next exhalation, start the timer and hold your breath. As soon as you feel the urge to breathe, inhale and stop the clock.

What was your time? Mine was 19 seconds, and we'll get into what's 'good' and 'bad' in a minute. This is your BOLT (body oxygen level test) score, or one way to measure carbon dioxide (CO_2) tolerance, from Patrick McKeown, CEO of the breathwork training programme Oxygen Advantage. Much like tracking your heart-rate variability or VO_2 max, CO_2 tolerance is a metric of fitness and overall health that you might be overlooking. And we can all benefit from tracking this stat.

'Breathing influences every system and cell in the body and can either help or hinder your fitness goals,' says PJ Nestler, director of performance for the training platform XPT. 'Your breathing is a weakness or a weapon.' While it's true that high CO_2 tolerance can help you run faster and longer, perhaps more importantly, a poor tolerance is linked with a variety of ailments.

The bigger your number, the more stress (of any kind) you can handle, says Emily Hightower, master yoga teacher and coach at the members-only training platform SH//FT. A quick refresh of respiratory physiology explains why. 'The whole purpose of our respiratory system is to keep a balance of two gases – carbon dioxide and oxygen – in the body,' says Nestler. While CO_2 travels through blood, it triggers oxygen to be released from the red blood cells to your tissues, muscles, brain and organs. A higher CO_2 tolerance means this process is more efficient.

You can see the impact in performance. Let's say you and I are running sprint intervals side by side on a treadmill at the same pace. If your CO_2 tolerance is higher, you'll be able to push for longer during work intervals. You may suspect there's a link to VO_2 max – the maximum amount of oxygen you can use in exercise. As you increase your CO_2 tolerance, you can improve your VO_2 max, too.

But CO_2 tolerance goes way beyond PBs. When you work on it with breathing practices, you can feel it in your reaction to stress as well. People who train their noses have more awareness and control when stressed. Think of it like this: you're at the start line of a race after a night of poor sleep and tummy trouble. Not ideal, but if your CO_2 tolerance is higher, you'll manage better. Read on for how to assess your own CO_2 tolerance – and easy ways to improve it.

Check yourself

Tests like BOLT give a good baseline of CO_2 tolerance using only a timer. Rest 10 minutes, then sit tall and follow along

1. Take a normal breath in and out through your nose.
2. At the end of that exhalation, start your stopwatch and hold your breath.
3. At the first noticeable urge to breathe, called ‘air hunger’, breathe and stop your clock. Note that number. (FYI: if you have to gulp in air, you held your breath for too long.)
4. Recover with normal breathing for two or three minutes.
5. Repeat three times and take the average as your final ‘score’.

Under 15 seconds
Poor CO_2 tolerance (it might look like high anxiety and low fitness); take it as a sign to focus on breathing practices to up resilience all round. Tolerance is trainable, and yours will soon soar.

15 to 25 seconds
Average. While not optimal, it’s a very common starting point.

25 seconds and above
Baseline goal. For those of us who aren’t elite athletes, aim to be above 25 seconds, says Nestler.

60 to 68 seconds
Elite! The tip-top range for freedivers and big-wave surfers.

Breathe better

You can see results in five to 10 days with just 10 minutes of daily practice. It’s best done in the morning or before a workout. Start a ritual today

▸ **IF YOU SCORED UNDER 15…**
Start with triangle breathing
That means inhale, hold and exhale (the three ‘sides’ of the triangle) for the same number of seconds. Start with three seconds and work your way up to five, says Nestler.

▸ **IF YOU SCORED ABOVE 15…**
Graduate to box breathing
Start with five seconds per ‘side’, so inhale for five seconds, hold for five, exhale for five and hold again for five. The goal is to do this cadence continuously for 10 minutes without having to revert to breathing the way you normally would. Once you master it, you can try a six, seven, then eight-second box.

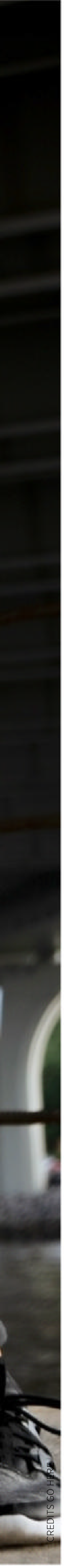
Go ahead, be nosy

Popping up in viral hashtags and health podcasts, nose breathing, or minimising airflow via the mouth, is having a moment. But really, the only time you need to purposefully breathe with your mouth is during high-intensity exercise to get rid of that CO_2 quickly. The rest of the time, nose breathing is superior, says Nestler. Your nose humidifies and cleans the air, filtering out any junk (such as exhaust fumes you inhale on a run) and fine-tuning the temperature. Plus, the nose helps to regulate the quantity of air going in and out, better balancing carbon dioxide and oxygen and adding nitric oxide, which has antimicrobial and antifungal effects and pools in the nasal cavity, so when you inhale through the nose, you breathe this gas too. All the more reason to stop and sniff.

Inflation is good when it comes to filling up your lungs with air

Free to move

Think of the word 'mobility' and we suspect physio comes to mind. But training your range of motion can deliver gains to both strength and performance



WORDS: JENNIFER NIED. ADDITIONAL REPORTING: ANDI BREITOWICH. PHOTOGRAPHY: STOCKSY

CREDITS GO HERE

The saying 'move it or lose it' should be the official slogan for mobility. Beyond your twenties, the ability to move freely and easily through a joint's full range of motion, begins to decline... unless you do something about it. 'Your muscles and tendons have less pliability after the age of 30, which means less fluidity in your movements and your joints,' says Candace Young, PT and staff physical therapist at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York. But nowadays, greasing up your joints is about more than just rehabilitation and recovery; it's actually tied to strength gains.

If you're thinking mobility is old news, you'd be right. But it's on everyone's minds right now – with Google Trends data confirming an uptick in interest in the concept during the past two years. (Experts suspect that all the extra sitting time resulted in stiff joints, hence the hunt for relief.) While mobility research is still centred on how it plays into injury recovery, the science is starting to catch up when it comes to mobility and overall fitness – and that's the area experts are eager to help everyday exercisers better understand.

Can't see an expert? Use your phone to track progress at home. McPeak advises filming yourself exercising and/or writing how muscles feel in a journal. You'll be able to see your position change and note what feels tight or loose over time.

Shout it from the rooftops: the ability to move your limbs freely is the secret sauce for staving off physical decline and improving performance for the long haul. 'Mobility is dynamic and essential to maximising your quality of life,' says Amy Hutson, PT at SSM Health Physical Therapy. In addition to injury prevention, you get posture perks and faster recovery. It primes your body for activity and offers a boost on goals. And, the biggie: it significantly helps to improve strength, says trainer India McPeak. 'By improving hip and ankle mobility, for example, you can achieve a deeper squat with proper form, which will ultimately result in your ability to lift both heavier and longer.'

No matter your starting point, you can transform your movability. 'A lot of people feel like they're either mobile or not – and that's not the case,' says Young. The optimal timing is up to you, from first thing to before bedtime. But with regular practice – ideally daily or at least three dedicated sessions a week – you'll feel serious improvements within two or three weeks.

Body shop

Your daily habits, posture and collective activities add up to your current mobility, or lack thereof. 'Being stationary or working a desk job greatly impacts these areas,' says Hutson. Here are the six zones to zero in on for optimal operation, then turn the page for your TLC plan

Ankle

These joints can move in multiple planes, but we often don't allow them to. 'Keeping your ankles mobile is a huge factor that often gets overlooked,' says Young. 'If you lose that mobility, it changes your walking pattern drastically.' It can also lead to painful issues such as plantar fasciitis or achilles tendonitis, or difficulty with direction changes on the fly in sports such as tennis.

Cervical spine

Common front-and-centre activities are not doing this neck area any favours. 'People can develop a forward head posture from looking down at devices,' says Hutson. Even chopping vegetables or doing dishes contributes. 'We're usually working on activities in front of the body, which tends to create more of a rounded shoulder posture and a rounded upper back,' says Young.

Hips

Prolonged sitting, lying and even standing tightens your lower back and hips, says Young. 'You need to be able to extend your hips appropriately for walking to reduce strain,' says Hutson. Running, too, can limit lateral (sideways) motion in the hips because you're always moving in a straight(ish) line, says Young. Tight hips also act as an obstacle to strength gains.

Thoracic spine

Your T-spine, or mid-back, stiffens whenever you're in one position for too long. This also affects how your shoulder blades travel along your ribcage, says Hutson, so you're not able to fully reach above comfortably. If you're someone who regularly deals with back and spinal stiffness issues, you're more likely to be missing rotational movement in the torso.

Lower back

Chair time strikes again for the lower back, with aches from a flexed spine. Lower-back muscles try to compensate for deficits above and below, causing stiffness, says Hutson. 'As you go through life, your vertebral discs lose some of the fluid that helps to keep them mobile,' says Young. This means you have to actively combat the degenerative changes that occur as well.

Shoulder

A sticky shoulder is more about what you're not doing. For example, if you've been throwing right-handed for years, the odds are you're not extending both of your arms to their full capacity. 'It's the joint in your arms that helps you reach the top shelf,' says Young. And in the gym, it can mean muscling through an overhead press using your lower back instead. Ouch.

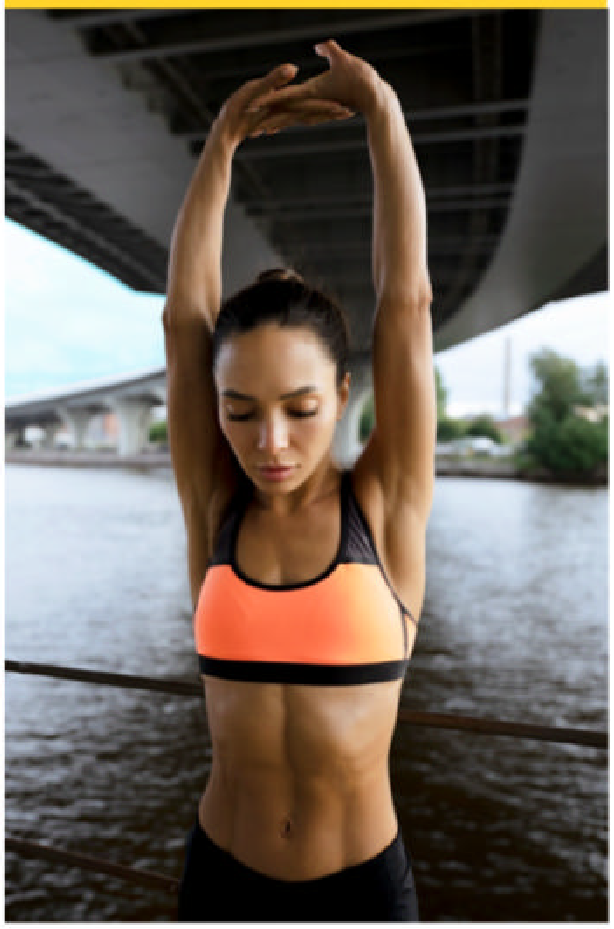
Train the trifecta

It's easy to confuse the '-ility' terms. Mobility, stability and flexibility are related, yes – and you can't excel at one without also working on the others. Allow us to clarify so you can shine in all three

MOBILITY
Feels like full, free and smooth movement in your joints. Any time you perform an active movement and push your range of motion counts in this realm, such as leg swings before a run or arm circles in a warm-up.

FLEXIBILITY
Deep static muscle stretches. Settle into a hamstring stretch or hold your favourite yoga pose and you're right on target.

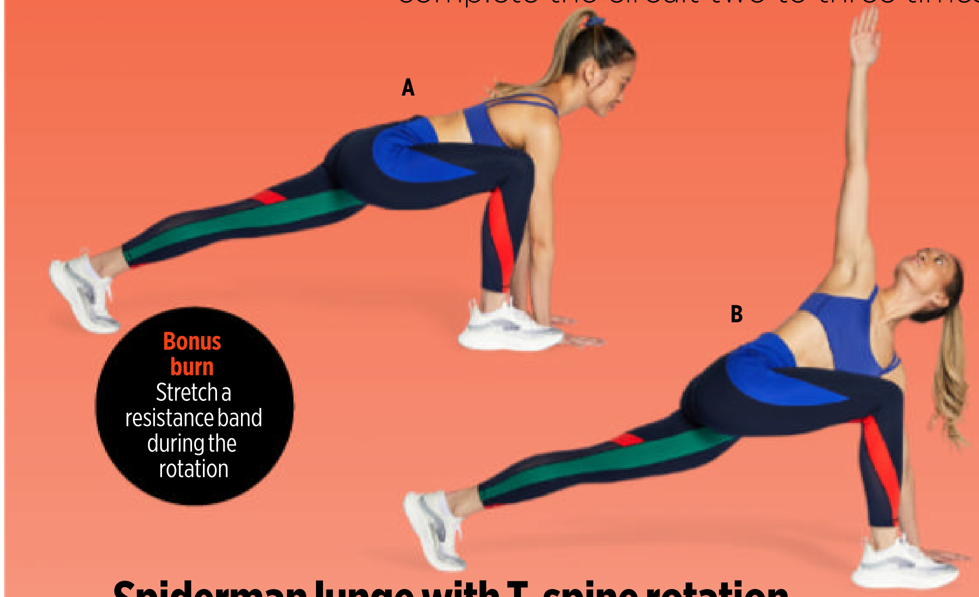
STABILITY
When you hold strong and steady in a position that challenges your centre of gravity. Think: a plank, maintaining a hip bridge or balancing on one foot.



ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: PHILIP FRIEDMAN (EXERCISE MOVES). STYLING: ROSE LAUTURE. HAIR AND MAKE-UP: KAYLA JO. CLOTHING: SPORTS BRA, LULULEMON; TIGHTS, WILSON SPORTSWEAR; TRAINERS, APL

Revamp your range

These four moves cover all your bases. 'The best exercises for you will be the ones that target anywhere you have weaknesses or you're lacking mobility,' notes McPeak – so feel free to up the reps and sets for specific moves your body craves. Ideally, complete the circuit two to three times to keep your body limber and pain-free



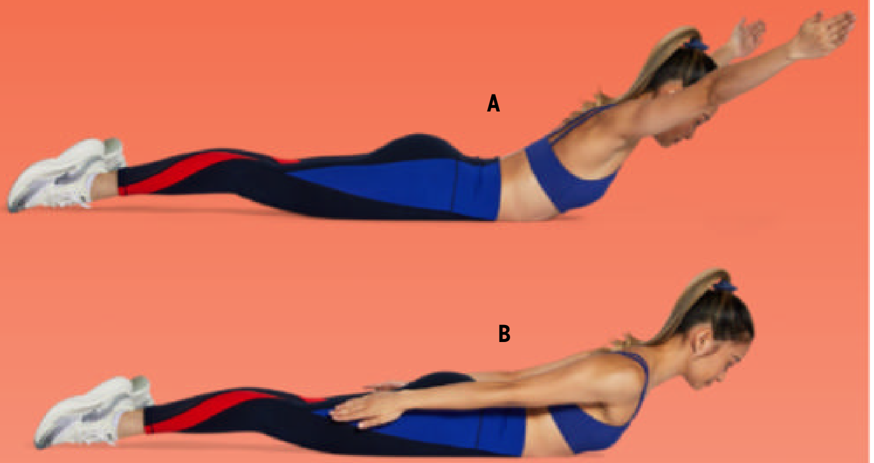
Bonus burn Stretch a resistance band during the rotation

Spiderman lunge with T-spine rotation

Focus: Upper back, T-spine, hips

- **How to:** Start in a high plank with your hands under your shoulders. Bend your right knee up towards your armpit and place your foot outside your right hand. Keep your left leg straight and push your hips down **(A).** Lift your right hand to the ceiling and rotate your torso, opening your chest and shoulders. Hold for 2 to 3 secs **(B).** Return to the starting position and switch legs. Do 6 reps on each side.

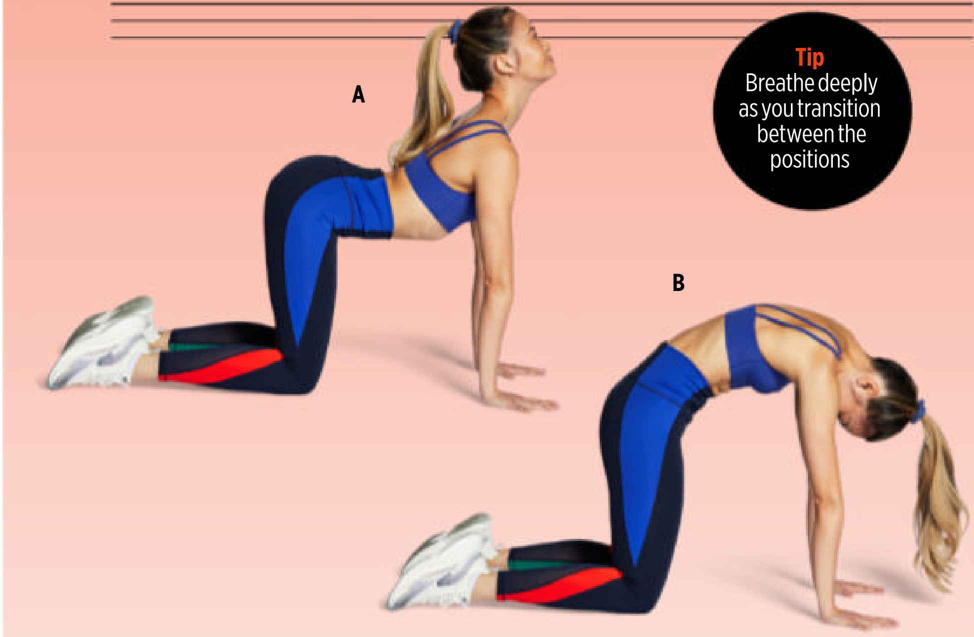
Bonus burn Hold light dumbbells in both hands



Prone swimmer

Focus: Upper back, shoulders

- **How to:** Start lying on your stomach with both arms outstretched **(A).** Raise your arms towards the ceiling, keeping your elbows straight, and circle back around as far as you can until your hands land behind your back **(B).** Reverse the arm circle motion back to the start and rest your arms on the floor briefly. Do 8 reps.

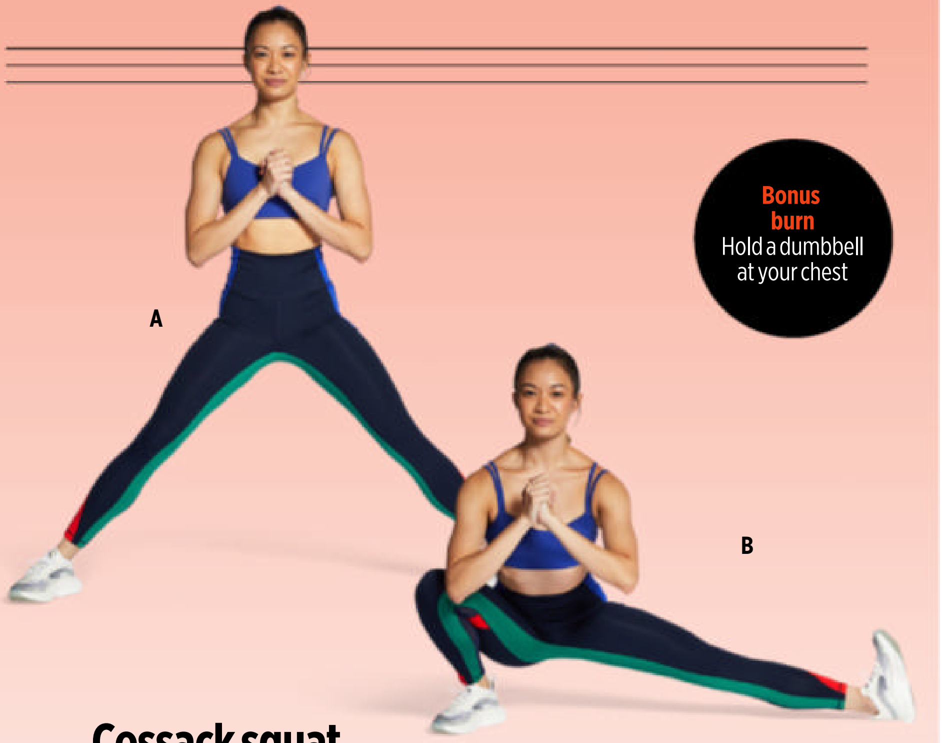


Tip Breathe deeply as you transition between the positions

Cat-cow

Focus: Upper back, lower back, T-spine

- **How to:** Start on your hands and knees with your hands shoulder-width apart and knees directly below your hips. Inhale, arch your back and look up to the sky in the 'cow' position **(A).** Hold for 2 to 3 secs. Exhale as your pull your belly button to your spine and curve your lower back. Hold this 'cat' position for 2 to 3 secs **(B).** Do 8 reps.



Bonus burn Hold a dumbbell at your chest

Cossack squat

Focus: Hips, ankles

- **How to:** Start standing with your feet much wider than hip-width apart and your arms clasped in front of you **(A).** Sit your hips back and lunge to the right, bending your right knee and keeping your left leg straight. Lunge as low as you can while keeping proper form **(B).** Hold for 1 to 2 secs. Do 12 reps in total, alternating sides each time.

Percussive therapy

Welcome to the *WH* Lab, where we put fit kit through rigorous tests to find out which pieces deserve a place in your workout arsenal

WINNER
1
Therabody

RUNNER UP
2
MuscleGun

BEST FOR STYLE
3

Percussive therapy: nope, nothing to do with tambourines, but it does involve rapid and repetitive pressure. It's a kind of massage that's become synonymous with the device used to initiate it. We're talking, of course, about the mighty massage gun – a wellness weapon that, in recent years, has taken the athletic world by storm, with everyone from dancers to boxers pummelling their muscles in pursuit of peak performance. And with benefits reading like a wellness wish list, a purchase could be a ticket to a new PB. Ready to level up your recovery routine?

01

Theragun Mini (2nd gen), £174, therabody.com

Score

●●●●●●●●●◐

If you're new to this percussive therapy malarky and you'd appreciate some guidance, our winning massager is a trusty pick. It pairs with the Therabody app, which is packed with follow-along tutorials, to show you how to get the most out of your session. It has one control button to turn it on and off and cycle through the speeds, making it a doddle to use and it's small enough to carry on the go (it also comes with a handy travel case you can hook on to your bag).

The *WH* Lab verdict: Yes, it's teeny, but this sleek device certainly isn't short on power. It glides smoothly over skin and comes with three tips for soothing different areas. There's only room for one head in the case, but that was our only gripe.

Key specifications

Weight: 450g
Amplitude: 12mm
Speed settings: 3
Battery life: 2 hours

02

MuscleGun Carbon Go, £169.99, muscleguns.co.uk

Score

●●●●●●●●●◐

'Small but mighty' is a fitting way to describe our runner-up. Sure, it's the size of a standard mobile phone, but it has everything its chunkier counterparts offer, and more. It packs a formidable punch (it's more powerful than the Theragun mini), you get four interchangeable massage heads to target different areas and our expert raved about how well it glided over their muscles. The handy travel case means it can be your new gym buddy, too.

The *WH* Lab verdict: The short handle makes it a bit awkward to reach the lower back, and it wasn't the quietest device we tested, but these are small flaws for an otherwise exceptional product.

Key specifications

Weight: 510g
Amplitude: 8mm
Speed settings: 3
Battery life: 3 hours

03

Hypervolt Go 2, £199, hyperice.com

Score

●●●●●●●●◐○

Yet more proof that good things come in small packages. This pocket-sized gadget will slip easily into your gym bag, but don't let its modest proportions fool you – it's more than powerful enough to pummel your waning muscles back to their prime. Our tester praised its seamless movement over their skin and found the step-by-step instructions really useful. But what we really loved about this one was its aesthetic – the sleek white design stands out in a sea of black.

The *WH* Lab verdict: We would've liked a carry case, but the compact, lightweight design cements its portable credentials. There are two massage heads to choose from and access to the Hyperice app.

Key specifications

Weight: 680g
Amplitude: 10mm
Speed settings: 3
Battery life: 3 hours

Women'sHealth
LAB
2023
UK APPROVED

4
BEST FOR FOAM ROLLING FANS
BEST FOR AT-HOME RECOVERY
RecoverFun PLUS
5
6
MYOPRO
BEST FOR TARGETING SPECIFIC AREAS

04

Hyperice Vyper 3,
£189, hyperice.com

Score

●●●●●●●●◐○

This may not be a muscle gun, but this vibrating foam roller sits under the percussive therapy umbrella. Hyperice claims the Vyper 3 will accelerate your warm-up, speed up your recovery time and keep you moving better. But does it live up to the, ahem, buzz? It certainly helped our expert ramp up their R&R efforts, leaving them feeling 'thoroughly massaged' afterwards, with its slanted ridge pattern and supple foam covering.

The *WH* Lab verdict: It's a top choice for all-round recovery, but if you want to target smaller muscles and niggly areas, look elsewhere. It's also fairly loud when placed on the floor, so you may want to warn fellow gym-goers before you commence a rolling sesh.

Key specifications

Weight: 1.2kg
Amplitude: Unavailable
Speed settings: 3
Battery life: 2 hours

HOW WE TEST

The *WH* Lab tested a variety of market-leading muscles guns to find the ones worth recommending. Our expert testers trialled the tools over a three-week period, using them to prime their muscles and recover around their hectic fitness routine, made up of weightlifting, running, HIIT, yoga and more. The guns were judged on their strength and impact on the muscles, as well as how easy they were to use, the practicality of their designs, the effectiveness of each attachment they came with and, crucially, how easily they glided over skin and muscles.

05

Recoverfun Plus,
£139, recoverfun.com

Score

●●●●●●●●◐○

Though bulky, this durable gun comes with no less than six swappable tips, so you can fine-tune your pre-workout prep and recovery. Our tester was a big fan of the bullet head for tackling knots and trigger points and said the spine head worked wonders on the lower back. While it can't compete with the most powerful models we tried, the motor is surprisingly quiet for a large device (even on the highest speed setting) so you can relieve your sore muscles without having to turn the TV volume up.

The *WH* Lab verdict: Weighing in at over 1kg, it's not one you can whack in the gym bag. If you're after quality and a reasonable price tag for recovery sessions at home, though, it's tough to top.

Key specifications

Weight: 1.13kg
Amplitude: 13mm
Speed settings: 5
Battery life: 3½ hours

06

MyoMaster MyoPro,
£249, myomaster.com

Score

●●●●●●●●◐○

Made for athletes by athletes, the MyoPro is ideal for gym goers who take their training and recovery seriously. The sheer variety of unique heads it offers is what really sets it apart – beyond the usual tips you'd expect, we loved the 'thumb' (self-explanatory), the 'XL scraper' (more enjoyable than it sounds) and the 'dampner' (which glides over joints like a dream). There's softer options, too, such as the 'ball' for when your DOMS is especially bad.

The *WH* Lab verdict: This muscle gun might be on the larger side, but it's certainly powerful and makes for a satisfying massage experience. It comes with a handle on the carry case if you do want to take it to the gym.

Key specifications

Weight: 1kg
Amplitude: 14mm
Speed settings: 5
Battery life: 3 hours WH

WORDS: PRIYANKAA JOSHI. TESTING: YANAR ALKAYAT; JODIE MORRISH. PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

Kinesiology tape

You've seen it strapped to athletes and dedicated gym-goers. But does it really help?

If you're looking to elevate your fitness game, kinesiology tape (aka KT tape) might be on your must-try list. After all, many athletes have been spotted wearing strips of neon-coloured tape on their arms, legs and, yes, faces, while competing. Kinesiology tape is made of elastic cotton, so it's super stretchy. And it's designed to kick-start the healing process – specifically, to soothe painful muscles and reduce swelling after an injury or intense workout. Here's the DL on the sticky stuff...

It soothes aches and pains

FOR MANY, YES

▶ There isn't much robust research to back this up, but Anna Ribaudo, an orthopaedic clinical specialist at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York, has seen it work for plenty of patients. Kinesiology tape is designed to lift the skin up from the tissue below with its strong adhesive. Depending on how you apply it, you can compress or decompress the problematic area. If, for example, you twisted your ankle, you'll want to give it some compression, which will keep it stable and help you return to normal activity, says Ribaudo. For muscle spasms, on the other hand, it's decompression all the way. That said, to get the most out of it, you need to apply it correctly. This requires a good knowledge of anatomy, so you'll most likely need help from a professional.

It calms swelling

IN CERTAIN CONTEXTS

▶ While it doesn't seem to make a difference in swelling caused by sports injuries, such as sprains, it may tame the issue after surgery. By pulling your skin up, kinesiology tape allows for better blood and lymph flow. That improves circulation and stimulates the lymphatic system to get rid of excess fluid in the body. For best results, Ribaudo recommends choosing tapes that are shaped like a hand and pointing the 'fingers' towards lymph nodes nearest the tape when applying. (Search for 'fan-cut' KT tape at retailers such as Amazon.)

It's a great recovery method

IT CAN BE

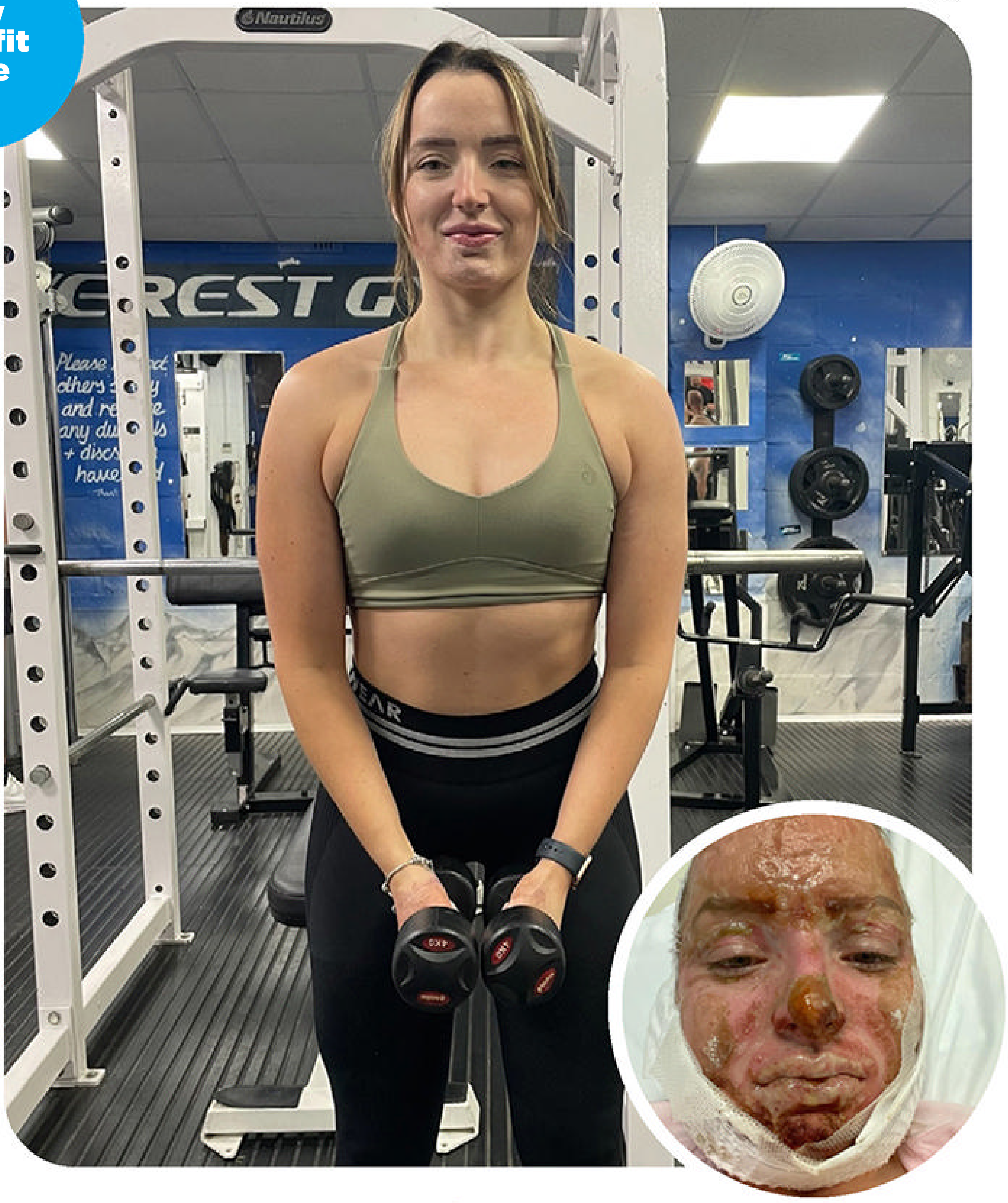
▶ Using KT tape makes sense for those with post-op swelling or a specific injury they're rehabbing with a personal trainer, as opposed to a generally healthy person who is, say, sore in the hammies after a tough workout. If you're in the latter group, stick to the basics, including dynamic stretches and eating and sleeping well, says PT Leada Malek. That said, KT tape is safe to try if you're curious, with the primary risk being skin irritation. (Tear off a small piece and test it on your skin beforehand – redness and itchy bumps are signs that it's a no-go.) It's also worth checking in with your GP and finding out the root cause of your pain to avoid reinjury, says Malek.

WORDS: JACKIE LAM. PHOTOGRAPHY: JEFFREY WESTBROOK. STYLING: MIAKO KATOH

How I get fit done

'I nearly died after catching fire, but my burns won't stop me from lifting'

Ashleigh Charlesworth, a 29-year-old nurse from Sudbury, suffered third-degree burns in a 'reckless act'. Almost two years on, she's just achieved her biggest challenge yet



I was enjoying a long-awaited trip to the pub with my cousin as lockdown restrictions eased in April 2021, when another customer recklessly sprayed alcohol on to an open flame. It exploded into a fireball, setting both of us alight.

As an A&E nurse for the NHS, I knew we had to 'stop, drop and roll' – a fire safety technique – and I put my hands to my face to protect my eyes. But the fire was too powerful.

I was rushed to hospital and spent 48 hours on life support in intensive care. Both my cousin and I suffered severe third-degree burns to our faces, chests and hands, and in the days that followed, we had multiple skin grafts. I was so terrified of my reflection that I covered all the hospital mirrors.

It was fitness that helped me build back my confidence. Due to my injuries, I had to pull out of a bikini body competition, but I was determined to compete again.

In June, five weeks after I was finally discharged from hospital, I attempted my first workout at my local gym. My hands were still bandaged, so I trained my legs, and while it was utterly exhausting, it felt amazing.

From then on, I started going twice a week, training with an online PT. We focused on my legs while using a grip strengthener for my hands. Seven weeks later, I managed to hold a 6kg dumbbell in my hands. I was elated.

Fast-forward 20 months, and I can lift the same weight I used to (my PB is a 120kg barbell deadlift). I train four times a week: legs on a Monday, cardio and a push workout (training the muscles used to push weight away, like my shoulders and biceps) on a Tuesday, cardio and a pull workout (working muscles that do the pulling, like triceps) on Fridays and legs again on Saturday. It hasn't been easy; I often reduce what I'm lifting when my hands hurt. But increasing the weight by 2kg per week has worked really well. And in November last year, I finally competed in a bodybuilding competition.

Adapting my diet has also been key to my recovery. After the accident, I upped my intake of fat and protein – both release myofibroblasts and satellite cells that work to repair damaged skin tissue. And now I'll add protein to meals for muscle strength. Breakfast might be turkey bacon and eggs on toast, lunch is usually a chicken wrap and dinner might be spaghetti bolognese.

I'm still not fully recovered. I have laser treatment every six to eight weeks to reduce the redness of my scars by targeting the blood vessels, but I don't let my burns define me. I'm Ashleigh with a burn, not Ashleigh the victim.

Bottom-line life advice
When you're knocked down, you *can* get up.

Motivational workout music
Spotify's Lifting Playlist is my all-time favourite.

Ideal way to spend a rest day
A walk, food and watching Netflix with my friends.

AS TOLD TO BRIDIE WILKINS. PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES; LOUISA PARRY

Jacket- by model's partner
Trousers - by model's partner
Make-up - by model's partner
Inadequacies - by model's partner
Desperation – by model's partner
Fear - by model's partner

Coercive control by your partner can take over your life.

From the colour of the lipstick you wear, to what you think, say and do, living with a controlling partner means that your decisions are not always your own. Coercive control is as serious as physical abuse, which is why it's now against the law. If your relationship doesn't feel right, it probably isn't.

We are here. 10am-6pm
chat.womensaid.org.uk

women's aid
until women & children are safe

Sit back and soak up the intel

The locker room

Introducing our latest dispatch from the *WH* fashion desk. From fresh launches to collabs and staff picks, here's the month's buzziest news. You heard it here first

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF OUTDOOR VOICES AT BROWNS FASHION

GRACE UNDER PRESSURE

What's the fun in saving your jewellery for a special occasion? If you haven't heard, Hey Harper, the original sweat-proof jewellery brand, offers timeless styles that are tough enough to roll with you 24/7.

Ring, £50, Hey Harper

THE JAG IS UP

Danner Jag boots debuted back in the 80s as a comfy alternative to stiff leather hikers. Thirty years later, the Jag is back and newly improved for a Free People collab. Expect gorgeous colours, PrimaLoft insulation and Danner Dry tech for confident puddle-hopping.

Jag boots, £168, Danner x FP Movement

THE COMEBACK KID

Believe it or not, retro sporty eyewear is having a major resurgence right now. Kylie Jenner and Bella Hadid are fans of Poppy Lissiman's new Caidyn sunglasses, which we'll be wearing out on our morning runs.

Sunglasses, £85, Poppy Lissiman

STAFF PICK

LENDING SUPPORT

Saskia Quirke, fashion director

'This slinky bra is perfect for yoga and equally as ace just on show under a shirt. Versatile, comfy, stylish.'

Bra, £80, Year Of Ours

YEAR OF OURS

STAFF PICK

HAT'S ALL, FOLKS

Courtney Smith, fashion assistant

'With this bronze stunner on my side, the sun's bound to show up sooner rather than later, right?'

Castillo sun hat, £54, Varley

SNOW BUNNY

*If glam is what you're going for on the slopes (or at the chalet), My Sunday Ski's latest collection is *the one*. Expect luxe, form-flattering separates and all-in-ones, such as the brand's new sherpa ski suits from £445.*

DOING THINGS…

Outdoor Voices is a hit with active-minded millennials in the US, due its inclusive sizing, sustainability and general coolness. Browns has brought the joy to UK shoppers. Prices start at £35, Outdoor Voices at brownsfashion.com.

M&S GETS ACTIVE

The Sports Edit, our favourite e-tailer for activewear, is launching on the M&S website. A whole new customer base will get to browse Girlfriend Collective, Alo Yoga, Hoka and more. TSE's range, YMO, will also release Collection 2, featuring its SoftLuxe yoga separates.

Bras, £45, and leggings, £68, all YMO by The Sports Edit on M&S.com

WONDER FROM DOWN UNDER

Kathmandu – Australia and New Zealand's number one outdoor brand – is available online to adventurers in the UK and Europe. The B Corp brand is celebrating with its new biodegradable NXT-Level jacket. The down filling is even traceable, via TrackMyDown, from farm to shipping.

Biodegradable NXT-Level jacket, £340, kathmandu.co.uk

PHOTOGRAPHY: (OPPOSITE PAGE) COURTESY OF POPPY LISSIMAN; DANNER; (THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT): COURTESY OF THE SPORTS EDIT AT MARKS AND SPENCER; MY SUNDAY SKI; OUTDOOR VOICES AT BROWNS FASHION; KATHMANDU

HUMANS BEING

Pop star Rita Ora, known as much for her killer abs as she is for chart hits, has entered the world of activewear. Humans Being is a sustainable line of athleisure that includes soft leggings and cycling shorts in trend-led colours.

Prices start at £45, humans-being.com

STAFF PICK

CAP IT OFF

Natasha Harding, fashion editor

'An on-trend baseball cap is my post-workout hair hero – and Adanola's cool, athleisure-inspired designs are my favourite.'

Hat, £14.99, Adanola x Pernille Teisbæk

MEET THE JEAN GENIES

Introducing Dala, which offers denim with a twist. Conscious production is key, with pieces designed in London and produced in a B Corp factory in South America. Lasers and ozone treatments are used for texture, rather than chemicals and abrasives. With sizes up to a 44 waist, this is the future of denim.

'Twisted Alley' jeans, £195, weardala.com

SWIM FAN

New-gen activewear label Year Of Ours is launching a swim category that includes on-trend pastels, lace-up details and flattering high-leg cuts. Roll on, summer.

Tiffany Bikini top, £73, and Football bikini bottom (both in Green Watermelon), £82, yearofours.com

SUN AND SEA

Pucci artistic director Camille Miceli's resort 2023 collection rebels against seasonality. A 'trippy chic' feel reigns across clothing for alpine adventures and winter sun-seeking jaunts. Pucci Resort 2023, prices from £75.

PHOTOGRAPHY: (OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): COURTESY OF HUMANS BEING; PUCCI; YEAR OF OURS; (THIS PAGE) COURTESY OF PE NATION; GETTY IMAGES

P.E NATION
asics
P.E NATION

ON THE A-TEAM

Following a riotously successful collab with fitness star Kayla Itsines, sportswear superstar P.E Nation is teaming up with the running pros at Asics. The fashion-forward edit is infused with shocks of hot pink, the colour du jour. We'll be nabbing the trainers and all of the shorts.

Bra, £55, and shorts, £72, both Asics x P.E Nation

STAFF PICK

IN THE BAG

Maddy Alford, shopping editor

'I'm a backpack girl through and through – tote bags just kill my shoulder once they're weighed down with my junk. I'm obsessed with the colours and functional pockets on this Tory Sport bag.'

Backpack, £235, Tory Sport by Tory Burch

STAFF PICK

VEST WISHES

Sophie Leen, bookings editor

'I'm ready to greet spring with shades of yellow and angel cherubs. This tank is perfect for Sunday cycles around London.'

Vest, £75, Fiorucci

WE NEVER THOUGHT WE'D SAY IT, BUT…

Yoga flares are back. The popular exercise trousers had their heyday in the 2000s, but thanks to Gen Z and the Y2K revival, these comfy trews are popping up again. Hailey Bieber wears them to Pilates, TikTok loves 'em and we like Sweaty Betty's Super Soft version.

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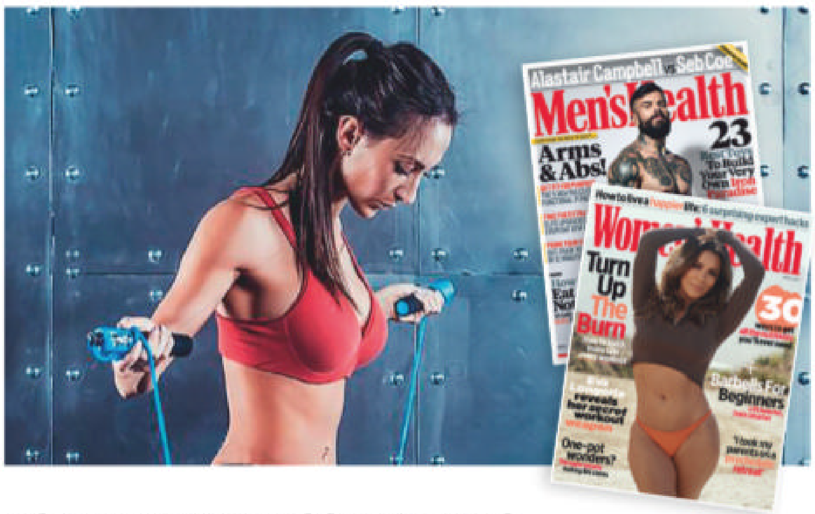
FOR THE HOME LOVER
Home is where the heart is, and nothing beats sitting down with a cuppa and taking some time away from your screen with our inspiring home and lifestyle ideas.

FOR THE TREND-SETTER
Perfect for those who like to keep up to date with our style guides and fashion, plus our limited-edition beauty boxes.



FOR THE FITNESS FANATIC
Workout ideas from top PTs, plus delicious meals and nutrition tips in our magazines and special editions offer the perfect motivation for those looking to achieve their health and fitness goals.

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Fit kit hero

Fancy footwork

The Nike Metcon 8 offers top-tier support for hybrid training

THE GUINEA PIG

Maddy Alford, shopping editor

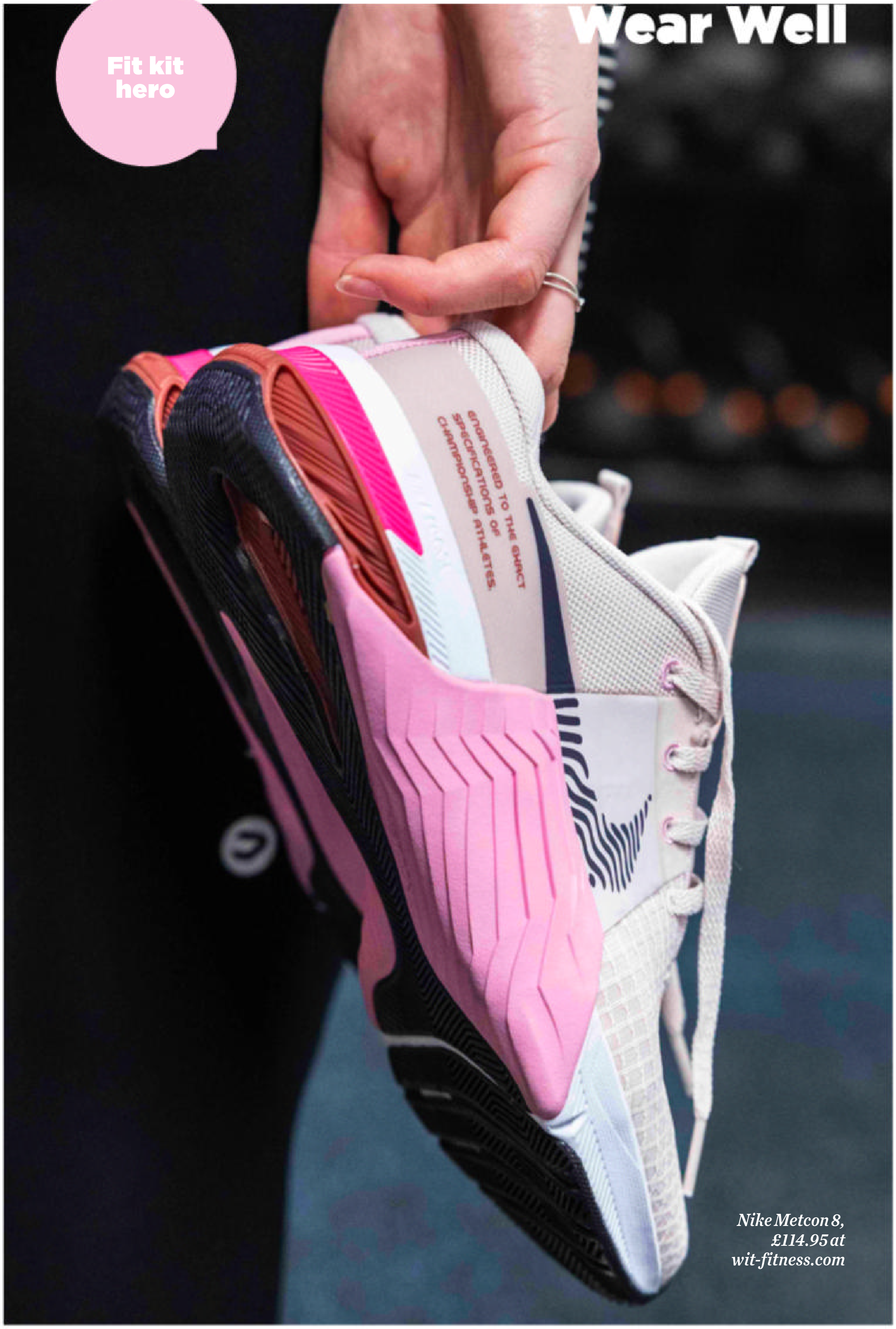
When I emerged from the pandemic a stone and a half heavier, I felt ready to find a new, healthy routine. Craving a challenge, I joined my local F45 studio and dove into the world of HIIT and functional fitness. I initially wore my ratty old running trainers, which lacked the stability needed.

I noticed that the class instructors wore some iteration of Nike Metcon shoes, which piqued my curiosity. So I tried out the latest version, the Metcon 8, and noticed an immediate jump in my performance.

'Metcon' stands for metabolic conditioning, so these shoes are tailor-made for hybrid workouts that combine cardio and resistance. They have a wide, flat heel so you feel firmly grounded. There's also a supportive inner plate along the sole. This provides added safety, especially when you're lifting heavy weights. And while the Metcons aren't as bouncy as a running shoe, Nike's signature React foam in the base gives enough springiness for sprints and cardio.

The upper fabric is light yet durable, which helps keep your feet cool, while the fine fabric combined with grooved soles offers a more comfortable range of motion during moves where your feet are bent. The rubber tread helps you step confidently on any surface, and a grippy rubber panel wraps over the arch, giving you traction for rope climbs (if that's your thing).

Nike regularly releases trendy new colours, so there's a pair for everyone. With these babies on (and my ride or die squat-proof leggings), I feel ready for even the toughest training sessions.

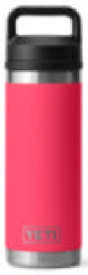

engineered to the exact specifications of championship athletes.

Nike Metcon 8, £114.95 at wit-fitness.com

MICRO TREND

THINK PINK

Pantone's colour of 2023 is Viva Magenta, but we're also loving all things pink of any shade



SAVE

Insulated bottle, £30, Yeti

The 'chug' cap lets you glug on the go with less spillage. Plus, it's cupholder-friendly for the car.

SPEND

Mantis 16 Backpack, £100, Arc'teryx

This lightweight daypack is designed for the trail, but it works for your commute, too.

SPLURGE

Denali Fleece Jacket, £145, The North Face

Denali jackets are just as iconic as they were when they debuted in 1988.

PHOTOGRAPHY: WIT FITNESS

The cutest fragrance ever created.
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SO CRAZY COZY, TELLEMENT DOUILLET.
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EAU DE PARFUM/VAPORISATEUR
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The WH beauty starter kit

WORDS
Brian Underwood
& Danielle Jackson

PHOTOGRAPHY
Massimo Gammacurta

From reading SPF labels to choosing lipstick, this is your cut-out-and-keep guide to skincare, bodycare and make-up. Welcome to beauty school, for beginners

Skin

So many creams and serums; so much uncertainty about how to use them and which ones you actually need. Here, derms reveal the essential info for a complexion kick-start

Make your fragrance last longer

Perfume sticks around on moisturised skin, so slather on a fragrance-free body cream first. Then it's about placement: warmer areas with greater blood circulation such as your neck and wrists cause the perfume to evaporate quickly, releasing a stronger aroma. Spritz your legs or chest for a subtle but lasting scent.

Your day and night routine

The most common question our beauty editor gets: 'Which products should I use regularly?' This streamlined regimen delivers results

Day

In the AM, prep your skin for the environmental onslaught (sun, pollution) with cleansing and protecting products.

STEP 1

Your pores didn't stop producing sweat and oil just because the sun went down. Whisk it all away with a mild non-foaming option.

Byoma Creamy Jelly Cleanser, £9.99

STEP 2

Vitamin C helps to blunt the damage from free radicals. Look for L-ascorbic acid.

SkinCeuticals C E Ferulic Vitamin C Antioxidant Serum, £150

STEP 3

The sun is responsible for the majority of skin ageing (not to mention skin cancers), so this part is vital.

Ultra Violette Supreme Screen Hydrating Facial Skinscreen SPF50+, £34

Night

This is when your complexion is in repair mode – you can help level up the process with targeted choices.

STEP 1

It's time to get rid of the day's built-up dirt, sunscreen and make-up. In this case, foam is your friend.

Caudalie Vinoclean Instant Foaming Cleanser 150ml, £16

STEP 2

The vitamin A derivative stimulates skin's production of collagen and speeds cell turnover for that fresh look.

Medik8 Crystal Retinal 3 Serum, £49

LANCÔME
GÉNIFIQUE

STEP 3

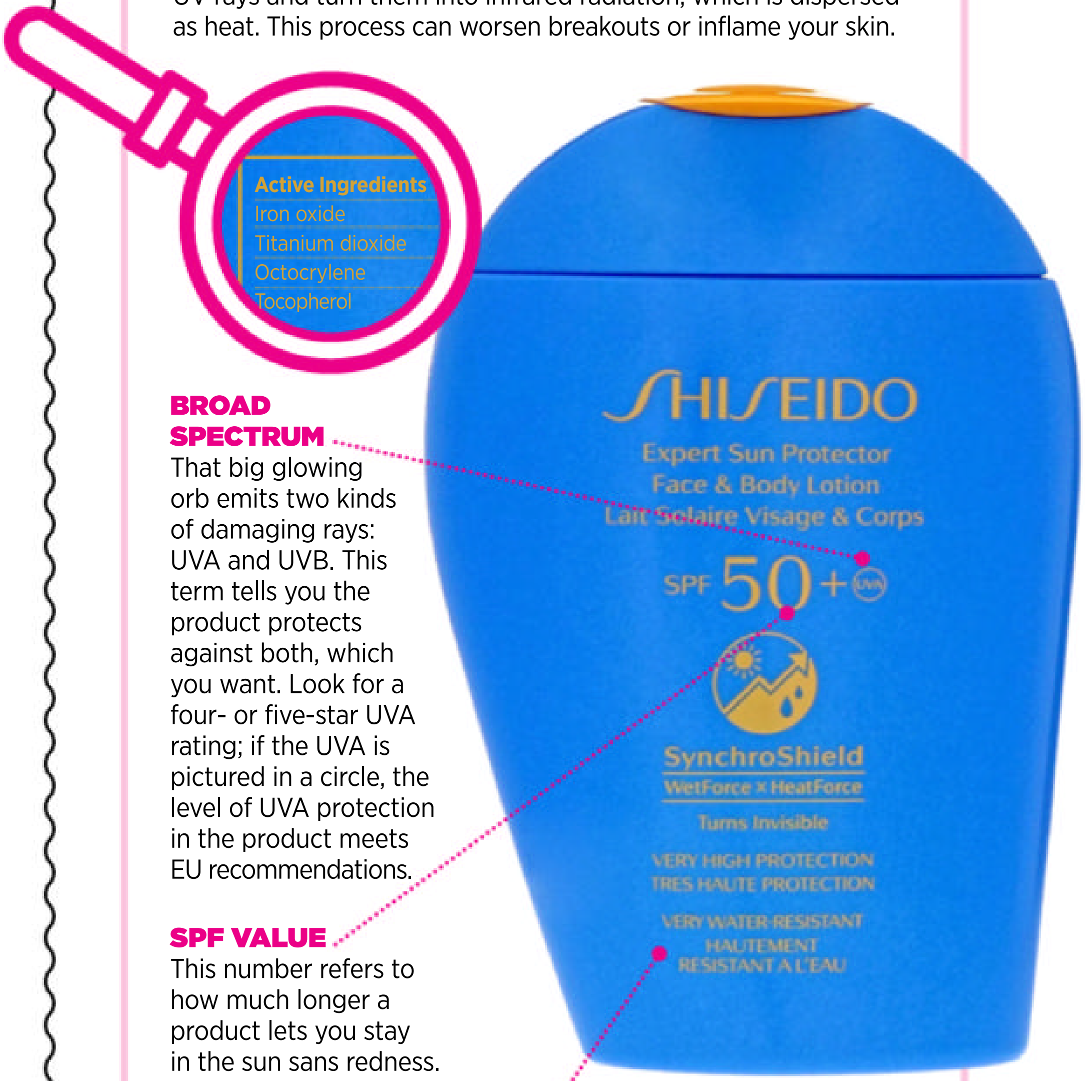
The key here is to choose something that's rich and occlusive to seal in moisture (your skin will lose a lot of it overnight).

Lancôme Advanced Génifique Night Cream, £65

How to decode an SPF label

ACTIVE INGREDIENTS

These are chemicals (avobenzone, octocrylene) or minerals (zinc oxide, titanium dioxide) that protect skin. Opt for the latter if you have sensitive or acne-prone skin; chemical formulas react with UV rays and turn them into infrared radiation, which is dispersed as heat. This process can worsen breakouts or inflame your skin.


Active Ingredients
Iron oxide
Titanium dioxide
Octocrylene
Tocopherol
SHISEIDO
Expert Sun Protector
Face & Body Lotion
Lait Solaire Visage & Corps
SPF 50+ UVA
SynchroShield
WetForce × HeatForce
Turns Invisible
VERY HIGH PROTECTION
TRES HAUTE PROTECTION
VERY WATER-RESISTANT
HAUTEMENT RESISTANT A L'EAU

BROAD SPECTRUM

That big glowing orb emits two kinds of damaging rays: UVA and UVB. This term tells you the product protects against both, which you want. Look for a four- or five-star UVA rating; if the UVA is pictured in a circle, the level of UVA protection in the product meets EU recommendations.

SPF VALUE

This number refers to how much longer a product lets you stay in the sun sans redness. Look for 30 or higher, apply a lot and top up at least every two hours.

Shiseido Expert Sun Protector Face And Body Lotion, £34

WATER RESISTANCE

If you're outdoors sweating or hitting the pool, make sure the product accounts for this. The British Association of Dermatologists recommends reapplying after swimming, sweating or towel drying.

Everything you need to know about... exfoliation

We hear you: glowy skin is your goal. The problem is, as you age, your skin's ability to shed dead cells slows (hello, dullness). That's why you've got to exfoliate regularly. There are two ways to do it...

CHEMICAL EXFOLIATION:

Products containing alpha hydroxy acids such as glycolic acid or lactic acid dissolve some of the 'sticky glue' that holds those dead skin cells together.

PHYSICAL EXFOLIATION:

Scrubs (pick one with smooth beads, such as those made from jojoba) manually whisk away those radiance-busting cells like a sandblaster.

No matter the product, most experts recommend using it sparingly (once a week). Apply light pressure with your scrub to avoid scratching.

hair

What sprouts from your scalp affects your mood – there's a reason a good hair day is a thing. Here are some tips for having more of them

Fringe benefits

The Marmite of the beauty world, this look is polarising. But blunt isn't the only way to go – there's a fringe to suit every face shape and hair type

SWOOP
This style dips across your face and tends to be more flattering on those with a rounder face shape.

BLUNT
A blunt fringe can be softened by adjustng the thickness. It can balance a balance a fuller forehead.

CURLY
A fringe is a great way to give your curls a whole new shape. Opt for a slightly longer one.

FEATHERED
This flattering, style is a great way to ease into a fringe, as it's similar to face-framing layers.

What's your type?

The typing system created in the 90s by stylist Andre Walker (he worked with Oprah) divides hair into categories. Knowing where you stand says a lot about your mane goals

Type 1 – Straight

Your hair has little texture and craves volume. Today's products give height without crispiness.

Type 2 – Wavy

The most in-between, 'S' shapes need moisturising stylers that won't weigh hair down (mousses, creams).

Type 3 – Curly

Dryness can plague women with curls, as natural scalp oils can't travel to your ends as easily. Wash sparingly with a hydrating shampoo.

Type 4 – Kinky

Tighter curls are the most prone to dehydration. Lather up once weekly, but reach for the conditioner every time you shower.

No-damage heat primer

Thanks to hot tools, the hair you were born with need not be the hair you walk out of the door with. This is how to get the high without the fry...

PILE ON THE PROTECTANT
These products – often sprays or serums – create a barrier between your delicate strands and the hot metal plates. Make sure your hair is well coated before cranking the dial.

THINK SMALL
Sections of no more than an inch are simpler to style – they require less heat and are much easier to control. That means you're far less likely to inflict any harm on your hair.

TURN DOWN THE HEAT
Just because your straighteners can reach 250°C doesn't mean you should go there. In fact, subjecting your strands to a temperature greater than 200°C may cause damage.

body

The skin below your chin deserves a little TLC, too. Spread the love from neck to toes with this pro insight

Smooth skin, no ingrowns

Razor bumps happen when coarse regrowth becomes trapped underneath the epidermis. Annoying? Yes. Hard to fix? Hardly. A few simple tweaks to your removal routine can really pay off

STEP 1

A fresh blade is the single most important factor in getting a good shave. Replace yours after a few uses.

STEP 2

Shaving cream isn't just fun and frothy – it helps to soften hair and protects your skin from irritation.

STEP 3

Glide your razor in the direction of growth so hair isn't lopped off too close to the skin's surface.

STEP 4

A few days post-shave, use an alpha hydroxy acid toner to dislodge cell build-up and stuck hairs.

Should you be *anti* antiperspirant?

In a word, no. Scientists investigating possible links between the aluminium used in sweat blockers (currently capped at 6.25% and 10.6% in spray and non-spray products under European law) and diseases such as Alzheimer's found no definitive proof. If, despite this, the whole thing still makes you feel uneasy, use a low-aluminium formula (brands are required to list percentages of regulated active ingredients on their labels).

The critical elements of a good moisturiser

A lotion's steadfast mission is to trap hydration by repairing your outer layer's naturally protective barrier. To do so, there are three main types of ingredients that must work together in synergy

EMOLLIENTS

To keep skin feeling soft, cosmetic chemists and product formulators use emollients such as squalane, lauric acid and linoleic acid to fill in the microscopic 'cracks' caused by dryness. They also help to give a moisturiser its 'slip' to help it spread easily across skin.

HUMECTANTS

These ingredients – hyaluronic acid, glycerin, urea and panthenol are a few of the biggies – act like water magnets, attracting and holding on to moisture in skin.

OCCLUSIVES

Think of the thickest, heaviest moisturiser you can imagine. That rich texture is likely due to ingredients such as petrolatum, shea butter and beeswax, and silicones such as dimethicone, all of which create a watertight seal over your skin so that hydration stays put.

Ace your base

With hundreds of varieties to choose from, finding a foundation can be tricky. Consider your skin type, your undertones and the coverage you want

Let's start with your skin situation...

DRY: You need a hydrating cream-based formula with a dewy finish.

COMBINATION: Creams or liquids with a demi-matte finish to stay moisturised while controlling shine.

OILY: A matte liquid fends off the greasy look (avoid oil-based foundations and follow with a setting powder if need be).

SENSITIVE OR ACNE-PRONE: Fragrance-free? Tick. Oil-free? Tick. Contains skin calmers such as squalane? Tick.

Next, what are your undertones?

WARM: If you're fair, you'll notice some yellow in your skin. Dark? It could look a bit reddish.

COOL: You have hints of blue pigments in your skin. If this is your undertone, consider formulas that lean more towards pink.

NEUTRAL: You fall between warm and cool, so your undertone may appear greyish. It's common in those with olive skin.

What kind coverage do you need?

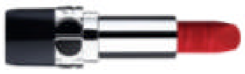
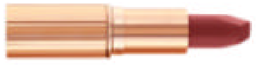
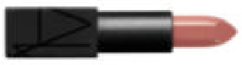
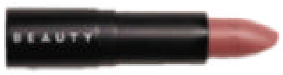
LIGHT: Need a touch of brightness to neutralise redness or to add some glow? Light is right.

MEDIUM: This is the your-skin-but-better formula. It can conceal imperfections such as scars, acne and hyperpigmentation and still appear natural.

FULL: Self-explanatory: opt for this if you want to fully cover your natural skin. Perfect for the evening, it gives you a seamless and long-lasting look.

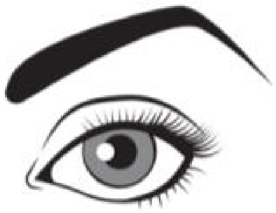
Lip service

Those undertones we mentioned for foundations... they're also the best way to find a flattering lipstick shade. We've done the legwork, so here's your best berry, nude and red

	Red	Berry	Nude
Warm	 **BRIGHT CHERRY**  Dior Rouge Dior Mitzah Edition Lipstick in Velvet, £34	 **CRANBERRY** Bobbi Brown Luxe Lipstick in Cranberry, £33	 **DUSTY ROSE** Huda Beauty Power Bullet Matte Lipstick in First Kiss, £23
Neutral	 **DEEP CRIMSON** Ilia Beauty Color Block High Impact Lipstick in Tango, £27	 **RICH BORDEAUX**  Charlotte Tilbury Matte Revolution Lipstick in Walk of No Shame, £26	 **CAFE AU LAIT**  Nars Cosmetics Audacious Lipstick in Barbara, £27
Cool	 **FIERY SCARLET** Anastasia Beverly Hills Matte Satin Velvet Lipstick in Royal Red, £21	 **DARK RASPBERRY** Merit Beauty Signature Lip Lightweight Lipstick in Fashion, £38.95	 **PINKY MAUVE**  Beauty Pie Futurelipstick Matte in Baby Beige, £20

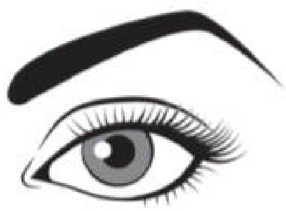
Eyeliner for every eye

If the eyes are the windows to the soul, eyeliner is the easiest way to add some sparkle. And how you line has a lot to do with the natural architecture of the area. Some thoughts...



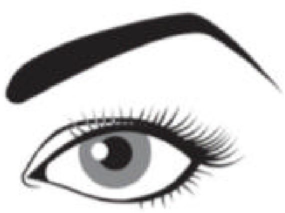
Round

Liner can be used to soften or elongate. Add it to your upper lashes and extend the line past your outer corner to visually widen.



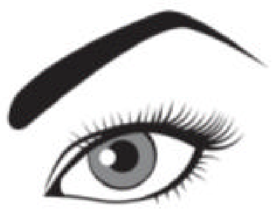
Almond

Winged liner – a line that begins at the inner corner, thickens at the iris and comes to a point that flicks out – complements your shape.



Hooded

A popular liner trend for this eye shape is the bat wing, where a C-shape extends to the outer part of the wing and is hidden by the lid.



Monolids

Start by drawing the line with shorter strokes as close to the lash line as possible – your aim is to fill the gaps between the lashes.

PROP STYLING: MEGUMI EMOTO. ILLUSTRATIONS: GETTY IMAGES

make-up

60

x

The percentage
of British women who wear make-up on a weekly basis, according to YouGov data. Of those women, 63% believe it delivers a confidence boost.

Whether you swear by a slick of lipstick to smash a big meeting or 'winged eyeliner' is a CV-worthy talent, a few smart products can elevate your routine from average to A game.

01
AG1
Comprehensive + Convenient Daily Nutrition
02
nuun SPORT HYDRATION
03
NARS
09
10
MUST de Cartier
08
06
Viviscal
Hair Growth Programme
The most clinically researched brand
Maximum Strength Hair Growth Supplement
Helps maintain normal healthy hair growth from within
60 Tablets Food Supplement
05
Wonderwild Miracle Butter
04
DRUNK ELEPHANT
Beste No. 9 Jelly Cleanser
07
ANASTASIA

#SKINSHELFIE

Tiffany Masterson

She's the brains behind one of the most beloved skincare brands. Drunk Elephant founder Tiffany Masterson opens up her bathroom cabinet

THE EXPERT
Tiffany Masterson, 53, founder of skincare brand Drunk Elephant

A typical day

As soon as I wake up, I drink some lemon water, along with a decaf coffee. I'll check my texts and emails before squeezing in an exercise session; then it's a quick shower and I'm ready for the day ahead. As chief creative officer and founder of Drunk Elephant, my working week is always busy and no two days are ever the same. I typically have lunch at home, which usually consists of bone broth, a turkey burger and a salad. After lunch, I'll juggle phone calls and launch meetings with making sure my kids have everything they need. When the working day is done, I'll run errands if I need to and then make dinner before watching the news while I do some more work and respond to emails. Finally, I wash my face, do my skincare routine, brush my teeth and take my supplements before going to bed.

Skincare philosophy

Less is more. Strip your routine back by just using a cleanser, moisturiser and SPF. I also avoid the 'suspicious six' – common ingredients that can lead to skin issues – silicones, drying alcohols, essential oils, fragrance, dye and chemical sunscreens.

Skincare non-negotiable

Instead of one non-negotiable product, I prefer to listen to my skin. Much like you might build a breakfast smoothie based on the nutrients you need that day, I create 'skincare smoothies' – combining the ingredients my skin needs at that time.

Main skincare concern

Before Drunk Elephant, I had all sorts of skin issues – my skin was breakout-prone and I struggled with mild rosacea and visible pores. Right now, my skin feels a bit dry, so I'll add hydrating ingredients to my skincare smoothies.

Day

01

ATHLETIC GREENS, *£97* FOR A 30-DAY SUPPLY (£3.25 PER DAY)

Every morning, I drink Athletic Greens, which contains a powerhouse of vitamins and minerals, along with adaptogens and probiotics, to kick-start my day.

02

NUUN TABLETS, *£8.58*

Ticking off hydration and health, I also have a huge bottle of electrolyte water boosted with a Nuun tablet, which helps support my immune system, thanks to the likes of vitamin C, zinc, magnesium and more.

03

NARS COSMETICS INSTANT LINE AND PORE PERFECTOR, *£21*

I use lots of oils on my skin so I tend to be quite shiny, which doesn't work well on camera. So when I'm being filmed, I always apply this to help unify my skin and create a sort of blurred effect.

Night

04

DRUNK ELEPHANT BESTE NO. 9 JELLY CLEANSER, *£27*

At night, I cleanse with Beste to remove make-up, dirt, pollution and any build-up from the day. I don't believe in washing my face in the morning, so I make sure I give my skin an excellent cleanse at night so it's hydrated and happy before bed.

05

DRUNK ELEPHANT WONDERWILD MIRACLE BUTTER, *£33*

After I've cleansed my skin, I mix together a cocktail of serums based on what my skin needs. I've been sealing it all in with a thick layer of my brand's Wonderwild Miracle Butter.

06

VIVISCAL MAXIMUM STRENGTH HAIR GROWTH SUPPLEMENT, *£56.99* FOR A 30-DAY SUPPLY (£1.90 PER DAY)

I've also been taking Viviscal healthy hair supplements every night to help with hair loss after having Covid. It's a daily supplement that combines iron, zinc and biotin to promote hair growth, along with Viviscal's trademarked ingredient AminoMar C – a marine complex blend.

Mood-boosting make-up

07

ANASTASIA BEVERLY HILLS BROW GEL, *£23*

I love the Anastasia eyebrow gel to lift and frame my face. It has staying power like nothing else I've tried, but still looks very natural.

08

NARS CLIMAX MASCARA, *£25*

Though I never wear foundation, I can't do without a quick swipe of mascara. The perfect volume of this mascara makes it my absolute go-to.

09

CHARLOTTE TILBURY HOT LIPS LIST NUDE LIPSTICK, *£26*

This creamy lipstick is a great everyday staple and the nude hue has become a bit of a signature for me. Plus, it's super-hydrating and protects against UV damage, too.

Signature scent

10

CARTIER MUST DE CARTIER EAU DE TOILETTE, *£111*

I've been wearing Must de Cartier since my school days and I still spray it on my clothes and wrists to this day. It's such a nostalgic scent for me.

AS TOLD TO AMELIA BELL. PHOTOGRAPHY: PIXELEYES

Hair oiling is having a moment

From *Bridgerton* to the shelves of Harrods, the Ayurvedic ritual of hair oiling has trickled into the mainstream. Here, Hanna Ibraheem goes back to its roots – and hers…

CREDITS GO HERE

It was the bane of my Sunday mornings as a child. My mum would come into the living room – where I'd usually be enthralled by *Sabrina The Teenage Witch* – with a green bottle of Dabur Vatika Coconut Hair Oil bobbing around in a bowl of hot water. If you grew up in a South Asian household, you'll likely know the drill. I'd diligently sit on the floor while my mum rubbed, massaged and patted the melted oil on to my scalp and down the lengths of my hair until it was soaked. Each session ended with me sporting a glistening, slicked-back plait and I'd always ask her, 'Do you promise I can wash it out before school tomorrow?'

You see, I'd noticed that my peers would get teased for their oiled hair on the school playground. Sure, the oil made my hair soft and strong. In fact, I know it's the reason why I have such healthy hair today. But at the time, I found the whole thing to be... well, embarrassing. Fast-forward 24 years and now I practically beg my mum for a hair-oiling session. I don't care about leaving the house with oil-drenched lengths and I actively hunt down hair-oiling recipes on TikTok. So, what's changed since I was a child? Well, a lot.

Back to your roots

Hair oiling has been around for more than 3,000 years, but only now is this South Asian practice starting to hit mainstream consciousness, alongside morning turmeric lattes and monthly threading appointments (fortnightly, in my case). More and more South Asian-founded haircare brands are launching their own hair oils into major retailers, and the practice even took centre stage last year in one of Netflix's most popular shows of all time, *Bridgerton*.

It's blowing up on social media, too. Simply scrolling through haircare content creator Seerat Saini's Instagram page reveals an encyclopedia of beneficial hair ingredients, including bhringraj (false daisy), curry leaves and even onion juice – though she does recommend rinsing your hair thoroughly after trying out the latter.

During a late-night TikTok sesh, I came across one of Saini's how-to hair-oil videos, in which she advocated that everyone use heated oil on their scalps. Growing up in a time when I wasn't reflected in the media, it was so refreshing to see something that spoke directly to me. I don't think I've ever double-tapped a post so quickly in my life.

'Hair oiling was a default part of haircare when I was younger, but I stopped aged 11, when I noticed my peers thought it was weird,' says Saini. 'I lost half of my hair in 2019 and turned to the hair routine I had once abandoned. This isn't a TikTok hack or a "slugging" trend – it's a way to nourish the entire head.'

Hands on

The tradition involves pouring warm oil on to your scalp and then massaging it in, taking time to focus on certain areas that stimulate blood circulation and encourage hair growth. 'In India, hair oiling is practised weekly by men and women,' says Michelle Ranavat, whose eponymous brand, Ranavat, became the first Ayurvedic skincare company to launch at Harrods earlier this year. And the great thing is it's so straightforward – all you need is some oil and your hands.

Begin by warming some oil in your hands and placing it on the top of your head – or your crown chakra, says Nikita Mehta, who co-founded the Ayurvedic haircare brand Fable & Mane with her brother Akash Mehta. 'Then massage it into the scalp and use the remainder to finger-brush through the ends. Tie your strands back in a bun or loose braid and leave overnight if you can – or at least five minutes.' Kuldeep Knox, founder of haircare brand Chāmpo, adds, 'The scalp massage is essential – it boosts blood flow and the circulation of oxygen and nutrients around the scalp, both of which promote healthy hair growth.'

Mind your head

Still need convincing to give hair oiling a go? 'As it dates back to ancient India, it's stood the test of time,' says Knox. 'Oiling nourishes the scalp and protects hair, which means shiny, lustrous locks with less hair fall.' Ranavat adds, 'Lots of people don't realise that the hair ages, as well as the environmental damage it goes through daily. It's important to protect it.'

The great news is that hair oiling is beneficial for pretty much every hair type, regardless of your ethnicity, and there are countless ingredients to choose from to tailor accordingly. 'Hair isn't "one size fits all", so choosing the best oil blend will depend on the specific needs of your hair and scalp,' explains Knox. 'I like to use amla oil to strengthen and stimulate hair growth, as well as coconut oil to condition and moisturise.'

The process of hair oiling can have a positive impact on your mental health, too. In Ayurveda, the ritual of self-massage, self-love and self-care is known as 'abhyanga' and involves seeing your hair as an extension of your body's energy. 'The crown chakra is an energetic point that, when touched, helps release stress,' explains Akash. He adds, 'There's a particular focus on alleviating tension from the roots.' He suggests using a hair oil containing adaptogens – plants thought to have stress-relieving properties.

Family hair-story

While everyone's hair-oiling journey may be different, many in the South Asian community were exposed to it in a very similar way. Now we're older, we recognise the importance of hair oiling in building familial bonds; it's an act of love. For me, I love knowing that my at-home hair mask is the same one my mum learned from her mother as a child in Yemen, and one I'll pass down, too. It also helped me break down the language barrier with my nani maa (grandmother) any time she visited.

When I ask Ranavat, Knox and the Mehtas about their own memories of hair oiling, they mention their grandmothers, too. '[Mine] would take me aside to massage my hair,' says Ranavat. 'We used the practice to bond and connect. I love how I've reconnected with it and I'm excited to pass it down to my boys.'

For Akash and Nikita, any time their grandmother visited from India, she arrived with handcrafted blends of plant oils, along with fables – hence the name of their brand. 'Our brand's DNA stems from the tradition of taking care of your hair, with regular oiling, originating from the Sanskrit word "sneha", which means to oil and to love,' explains Akash. 'Most Indian households experience an oil head massage by a family member to grow hair and relax the mind. This is usually performed before bedtime and makes room for stories and fables to be shared.'

Back to *Bridgerton* and Kate Sharma (played by Simone Ashley) takes the time to massage oil on to her sister Edwina's (Charithra Chandran) head during a time of need. Not only is it to help Edwina's hair grow stronger, but it's a moment of intimacy and bonding between the two sisters.

Now, hair oiling no longer feels embarrassing, but instead fills me with pride. It isn't just a way to treat my hair – it's something that will always bring my mum and me closer together.

Oils to invest in…

Prefer things ready-made? These formulas are *oil* you need (sorry)

For thin or coloured hair
Chāmpo Weightless Hair Oil, £28

For damaged hair
Fable & Mane HoliRoots Hair Oil, £29

For dry, brittle hair
Organic Oils By Hema Orange Passion, £41.99

For hair prone to falling out
Mauli Grow Strong Hair Oil, £32

For thick hair or flaky scalps
Ranavat Fortifying Hair Serum, £70

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES; STUDIO 33

Your oiling cheat sheet

Inspired to whip up your own bespoke hair oil? Here, five hair-oiling fanatics share their favourite recipes to help get you started…

Hanna, deputy beauty editor at *Cosmopolitan*

SOFTER AND SHINIER HAIR

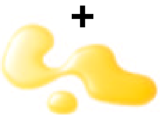
=

3 tbsp coconut oil

+

1 tbsp rosemary oil

+



10 drops vitamin E oil

Akash and Nikita,
founders of Fable & Mane

HEALTHIER HAIR

=

1 large onion, juiced

+

½ tbsp black seed oil

+

7 tbsp coconut oil

Note: leave on for no longer than four hours

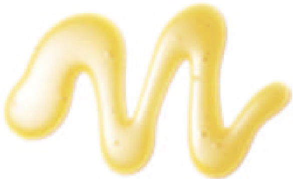
Kuldeep,
founder of Chāmpo

AN IRRITATED SCALP

=

3 to 4 drops tea tree oil

+



1 tbsp rose oil

+

3½ tbsp sweet almond oil

+

160g brown sugar

+

1 tbsp castor oil

Seerat,
content creator

HAIR GROWTH

=

1 tbsp fenugreek

+

A few curry leaves

+

1 tbsp amla powder

+

1 tbsp soapnut powder

+

1 tbsp shikakai powder

+

1 tbsp bhringraj powder

+

1 tbsp coconut oil

+

1 tbsp castor oil

WORDS:
SARAH GRAHAM
-
ARTWORK:
PETER CROWTHER

HEARST
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PAUSE?

Brands are waking up to the power of the menopausal pound – and business is booming. But as experts warn women could be wasting their money at best and risking their health at worst, who's really profiting?

There's everything from meno-lubes to knickers that filter farts

menopause
30 CAPSULES

Potential 'remedies' dent your wallet and might not even work

There was a time not too long ago when the menopause section of the pharmacy was a dusty shelf stacked with Tena pads. But step into your local branch today and you'll soon realise this life stage has had a serious glow-up. From supplements and serums to face mists and magnesium, the menopausal woman is the wellness industry's new darling – and the high street is the tip of the iceberg.

A cursory google reveals everything from menopausal meal plans to monthly subscription boxes. If an oestrogen deficit is damaging your dermis, a luxury lotion is just the balm. Things a bit dryer down there? There's a meno-lube for that. Among the more 'out there' offerings *WH* came across was a pair of knickers designed to turn down the volume on menopausal flatulence. Read: they filter your farts. Throw in the alternative therapies, exercise classes, spa treatments and retreats and the subtext is clear: menopause is a problem that you can throw money at.

That brands are falling over themselves for a portion of the menopausal pound is hardly surprising following a year in which the life stage went from hushed up to headline news. If Davina McCall started the conversation with her documentary *Sex, Myths And The Menopause*, MP Carolyn Harris picked up the mantel with her campaign to outlaw prescription charges for hormone replacement therapy (HRT). So successful have attempts to raise awareness of the plight of the menopausal woman been that the NHS has struggled to keep pace; widespread shortages of HRT led the government to introduce a menopause 'task force' to help pharmacies meet demand for the drug that's on more women's radars then ever before.

Fast-forward to today and menopause is becoming not just the hottest topic in wellness, but the most lucrative. The global menopause market is expected to reach $21.6bn (£17.79bn) by 2026, and a report by the Female Founders Fund suggests it represents a $600bn (£494bn) opportunity for companies (an opportunity that remains largely untapped). But brands and investors are waking up to its potential. The Female Founders Fund reports that menopause start-ups globally have raised more than $250m (£205m) in investment since the start of 2009. Among the recipients are the app-based telemedicine platform Peppy, the Womaness range of moisturisers and Thermaband's temperature-regulating smart wearable device.

Game-changing innovations that help women manage a smorgasbord of symptoms? Perhaps. Yet, female health experts are already warning that with potential profits of this magnitude comes an elevated risk of exploitation, be that parting with your hard-earned pounds on products that under-deliver, following the advice of unqualified experts or engaging in holistic therapies at the expense of medical treatment. So as the menopause marketplace continues to grow, who are the real beneficiaries?

DIY SOS

One trend that epitomises at least some of the criticism levelled at Menopause Inc is the boom in sales of at-home hormone testing kits. They claim to identify whether you're in menopause or perimenopause by measuring levels of follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) in a urine or blood sample. A quick Google search reveals countless options, ranging in price from a fiver to £100 or more – and sold in high street pharmacies as well as by the private testing companies that produce them. But last year, the British Menopause Society (BMS) and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) felt compelled to speak out against them. Both organisations advised women not to waste their

money on such tests, which fail to accurately indicate if someone is menopausal, recommending instead that women 'seek support from a healthcare professional... [as guidance] recommends diagnosing perimenopause and menopause by looking for common symptoms such as hot flushes, night sweats and irregular periods'.

With potential profits comes a risk of exploitation

Such advice seems sound, until you consider just how difficult that can be. Rebecca Seal's experience is a textbook example of why such a market exists. The London-based author was 39 when her periods became erratic and so heavy that they'd soak through an ultra-tampon in an hour. Before long, she was no longer sleeping through the night; she put on weight she couldn't shift and found herself succumbing to fits of rage. 'Even though I'm still quite young, a menopause-aware doctor would probably hear all that and identify that I was perimenopausal,' she says. Instead, Rebecca's GP insisted she needed a blood test to confirm her hormone levels. But doing that within the NHS system proved... challenging. Her unpredictable periods made scheduling a test at the necessary point in her cycle nearly impossible. After 12 months of trying and failing, she decided to spend £25 on a home testing kit instead. But when the results came back, they indicated her hormone levels were normal. 'The results did come with a caveat that I could still be perimenopausal,' she says. The test was a long way from being the confirmation she thought she was paying for.

ZEN-O-PAUSE

While not an insubstantial amount of money, £25 for an inconclusive blood test is a drop in the ocean compared with the megabucks you can spend in pursuit of a symptom-free menopause. Search Queen Of Retreats and you'll find menopause retreats with three- or four-figure price tags. Available across the UK and further afield, they typically offer well-documented cortisol-curbing activities such as yoga, meditation and massage, alongside complementary therapies and workshops on managing symptoms. Led by fitness instructors, therapists and nutritionists, most offer a holistic approach to menopause while being careful not to make promises about symptom reduction. They appear to offer little more than a standard wellness retreat, except perhaps a presentation on understanding 'The Change'.

Elizabeth Joseph was 43 when she stumbled blindly into perimenopause. 'It took me two years to work out I didn't have an autoimmune disease or dementia and I wasn't depressed,' she says. Her frustration at being so poorly informed drove her to Instagram, where she shares her experiences navigating non-medical menopause solutions as @TheMenopauseGuineaPig. Now 50 and living in the north-east, she's tried a dizzying number of holistic offerings, from the 'properly bonkers' hormone yoga to a guided womb massage. A cacao ceremony was underwhelming (essentially, a candlelit hot chocolate) and while a gua sha stone massage was pleasant, the only thing 'distance reflexology' over Zoom induced was a chronic case of the giggles.

Despite trying dozens of products and services, the best solutions Elizabeth has found have been the kind that aren't attached to a price tag. Strategies such as cold-water therapy (either in the form of wild swimming or cold showers), consciously trying to be more mindful, eating a Mediterranean diet and training with resistance bands and hand weights three times a week. And orgasms. Lots of them. 'Orgasms help with every single symptom – sleep, period pain, sex, brain fog, pain, skin, mood and digestion,' she enthuses. 'Plus you can have an orgasm on your own, as well as with a partner.'

And while the majority of Elizabeth's experiences were gifted in exchange for honest reviews on her Instagram page, she's a long way from breathlessly endorsing them. 'You could spend a hell of a lot of money on what's essentially just acts of self-care,' she says. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, we could all benefit from reprioritising quality time for ourselves one way or another. But for Elizabeth, there's a big difference between the 'genuine and supportive' practitioners she's seen for treatments and the brands who've 'gone from ignoring middle-aged women to targeting us'.

SPEND THE GAP

Of course, this transition from 'overlooked' to 'target market' isn't purely driven by commercial opportunism; as Rebecca and her ill-advised hormone test can attest, the failings in our healthcare system are also to blame. It's a natural trajectory for patients to become consumers when they can't access adequate care from the one place they should be able to: their GP surgery. A 2021 survey by the Menopause Support Network found almost half of menopausal women have been forced to seek private healthcare after failing to get the care they needed from NHS GPs, with some racking up huge debts to do so. It's in this context that the commercial menopause industry is thriving. 'A lot of women feel they have no choice but to put their hands in their pockets,' says Diane Danzebrink, founder of Menopause Support and the Make Menopause Matter campaign. 'Their GP might not have the knowledge to manage them, there may be huge waiting lists to see a specialist, or they might not even have an NHS clinic in their area.'

> 'A lot of women feel they have no other choice'

It was into this landscape that Andrea Berchowitz launched Vira Health in August 2021, with an app that offers personalised menopause plans and expert support. A former management consultant, Berchowitz decided to act after hearing from senior women in her business network who were struggling with menopause symptoms at work. 'Many women I knew were in private healthcare for the menopause, spending [huge amounts] of money,' she tells *WH*. 'I thought: something's broken here. If women who are partners at law firms and leading teams at investment banks are having difficulty getting the support they need, the average woman must be really underserved.' In March 2020, alongside co-founder Dr Rebecca Love – a chronic disease epidemiologist – she set out to create 'the lowest cost private option' that would make evidence-based, high-quality care more accessible. Subscriptions to the app spike whenever menopause hits the headlines.

Paula Briggs isn't surprised by this. As chair of the BMS and spokesperson for the RCOG, Dr Briggs celebrates the airtime this life stage is now being afforded. The problem is, she points out, it's happened 'back to front'. 'Instead of having a chance to sort out

Menopause is a life stage, not a medical condition

training and service provision on the NHS, we've got a huge amount of awareness but we're not quite at the stage where we can deliver the right services in the right place,' she explains. The result, she adds, is a gap in the market that's being filled by both private practitioners and businesses. Despite being at the forefront of menopause's positive PR push, Danzebrink agrees it's a double-edged sword. 'My fear is that people are desperately searching for a solution, and we now have solutions coming from all directions, which can feel overwhelming,' she says. More concerning still, she explains, is the direction of travel for healthcare – the emergence of a two-tier system where the wealthy can access any number of solutions, while the rest are left struggling. 'If you have the money to spend, that's your choice,' she adds. 'But we should never have put people in a position where they're running up significant bills because they can't get the help they need from the NHS and this is absolutely going to get worse with the cost of living crisis.'

TAKE PAUSE

As for what this means for the average woman in the market for a more manageable menopause, the experts we spoke to for this feature were in agreement that, for all the issues in accessing care, the NHS remains the best place to start. 'Menopause is not a medical condition, it's a life stage, and it should be managed as a life stage,' says Dr Briggs. 'But it's not appropriate to have people without medical training taking money for consultations and giving advice they're not qualified to give.' She recommends asking if there's a GP or practice nurse at your surgery with special training in the menopause, so you can be sure you're getting the best possible advice. If your GP isn't suitably menopause aware, she adds, Women's Health Concern – the patient-facing branch of the BMS – charges a small fee for its expert-led advice line.

Outside the NHS, experts recommend taking the same read-the-small-print approach that you would for any other area of wellness – manage your expectations, do your homework and take social media promotions with a pinch of salt. Take supplements, for example. 'There's no need to waste your money,' says Dr Briggs. 'With the exception of vitamin D, supplements really aren't necessary. These products are sold as 'quick fixes', but they aren't regulated and most people don't actually know what they're taking anyway. As long as you're eating a balanced diet, you should be able to get all the nutrients you need from your food.'

It's worth noting, too, that while many holistic products and services have a long history of traditional use, along with anecdotal benefits, very few are backed up by robust scientific evidence. That doesn't mean these treatments won't help you, but it pays to seek medical advice before trying anything new – particularly to make sure there aren't any known risks, side effects or interactions with drugs you're already taking.

Ultimately, there's no 'one size fits all' for the menopause, but there's no need to bankrupt yourself to find what works for you, either. After her at-home hormone test failed to provide any answers, Rebecca is gearing herself up to try again with a different doctor – one who's well-versed in menopause management. As for Elizabeth, she's getting on fine with her arsenal of affordable, natural solutions – and having a lot of fun being a guinea pig while she's at it. If the menopause revolution has shown us anything, it's that women living this life stage are no longer prepared to tolerate the status quo – and that includes wasting their money on duds.

How to have an evidence-based menopause

Dr Briggs shares her advice on the best ways to tackle the menopause using science-backed strategies

The medical route

The National Institute For Health And Care Excellence (NICE) recommends HRT. Evidence shows that, for the majority of patients, the benefits outweigh the risks. That doesn't mean it's for everyone – it won't usually be recommended for anyone with a history of oestrogen-sensitive cancer. The sooner that you start, the quicker you'll benefit from HRT's protective effects on bone and cardiovascular health. Administering HRT through the skin as a patch, gel or spray avoids the risk of blood clots.

In perimenopause, another option is a Mirena coil, which can help to manage bleeding. If you can't or don't want to try HRT, non-hormonal pharmaceutical options for hot flushes include Clonidine and Gabapentin. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and antidepressants can help with symptoms such as depression and anxiety.

The DIY route

Aim to eat a balanced diet, including plenty of fruit and vegetables, as well as calcium sources such as dairy and kale. It's a good idea to take a vitamin D supplement, particularly during the winter months – but most supplements aren't necessary.

Weight-bearing exercise builds muscle mass and keep your joints active. This can be as simple as walking, running or dancing. Incorporating some weights and resistance training can be useful, and Pilates is great for both relaxation and pelvic floor strength.

There's some evidence to support hypnotherapy for sleep disturbances and hot flushes, but you'll probably have to pay for private treatment.

***Rebel Bodies* by Sarah Graham** (£16.99 Bloomsbury Green Tree) is available to buy now

The biology of bereavement

Grief is finally getting more airtime, with memoirs, podcasts and communities providing a platform for a subject that once flew under the radar. And yet, the physiology of grief remains under-studied. Here, one writer reports on what happens in your body and brain when you lose someone you love

WORDS: CATRIONA INNES

Grief has puzzled researchers for decades

All I could see was white. White tiles, white toilet bowl, white dots floating just ahead of me that remained even when I shut my eyes. I'd just thrown up and was wedged – knees to my chin – in the cubicle-sized bathroom of my uni halls. I was due in a lecture, but the nausea had been building all afternoon, climaxing just as I'd planned to leave. This wasn't a hangover, or a bug. This exact sequence of events had happened at the exact same time the week before. In fact, the one time I'd made it into this lecture I spent the entire time swallowing down bile, holding the sides of the chair so as not to run out. As absurd as it sounds, there was something about that specific lecture that was literally making me sick.

It's only recently, 16 years older than that quivering 21-year-old fresher version of myself, that I can see what I was experiencing: a physical reaction to the intense grief I was living through. You see, the module was an introduction to feminist theory. I'd signed up as I wanted to feel closer to my mum, a feminist writer, who'd died two years earlier and who I'd been struggling to remember. I can see now that my body flipped into a form of avoidance – the pain of that loss making itself known in physical and confusing ways.

Emotional pain can feel the same as physical pain

TIME TO TALK

I've been unpicking that time a lot lately. After feeling a great deal of shame around my ongoing grief, I launched a newsletter – *Crocuses In The Snow* – as a means to better understand grief and how it manifests. And I'm not the only one talking about the topic. Grief is now a mainstay in popular culture. Last month saw the publication of *You Are Not Alone* by Cariad Lloyd, a book inspired by her hugely successful podcast, *Griefcast*, for which she interviews (mostly) comedians about their losses. *A Heart That Works*, actor Rob Delaney's memoir on the death of his young son, is now a *Sunday Times* bestseller, while actor Dan Levy recently announced that his latest Netflix project, *Good Grief*, helped him work through his own loss.

That grief is finally getting some airtime makes sense – and not just because we're coming off the back of a period in which millions lost loved ones, along with the opportunity to say goodbye. Bereavement is a common experience, and one most of us will encounter multiple times over the course of our lives. It's also a lonely one, in which you can feel desperate for reassurance that what you're experiencing is normal. But the question of what normal grief looks like

'The grief I feel now isn't the same as what I felt at 21'

is one researchers and doctors have been puzzling over for decades. Part of the problem is that we talk about grief as if it's an emotion. In reality, it's a tangled web of emotional and physical symptoms, felt differently depending on the bereavement, as well as the time frame in which you experience it. The grief I feel now isn't the same grief I felt at 21. Nor will it resemble the experience of a different form, such as the loss of a child.

But difficult as this research may be, it's vital. It can help us to find the right words to explain to our employers (or, in my case, lecturers) what we're going through. Research carried out by Marie Curie discovered that 54% of employees worried that taking time off after a bereavement would affect their job security. It could also help differentiate between what emotional and physical symptoms will ease over time, and what may need medical or therapeutic intervention. Last March, the *Diagnostic And Statistical Manual Of Mental Disorders* (DSM) officially recognised prolonged grief disorder. The inclusion in the US publication, which doctors use to describe disorders, will mean that those who find themselves still in intense grief after a year can have their treatment covered by insurance companies. While the DSM isn't used in the UK, its influence has opened up a discussion on the biology of grief, and its impact on our health.

PAIN STAGE

I used to think grief was mascara-tears and black lace – an over-romanticised view that instructed me that it would be over soon. But I didn't cry at my mum's funeral. I went back to the bar job I took while my mum was ill almost immediately after her death. I was Ross-from-*Friends* fiiiiiinnne whenever anyone asked. I operated – for years – within a numb fog, bored by my own existence. My malaise punctuated by false, early-twenties joys – the fleeting crushes and tequila-fuelled nights that served as an excuse to let the tears flow. Even when I began to feel the pain of losing her, I forced myself to bury it, feeling I'd missed my 'moment' for help.

I'd search for my place within the 'five stages of grief'. But unable to pinpoint myself – was I in denial? Anger? – I felt lost. The model, introduced by psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in 1969, is often cited as a basis for grief research. But it was based on people who were dying, rather than those who'd lost someone. It's since been discredited by researchers, who argue that it puts harmful pressures on the process. It also fails to account for what's going on in the body, as Mary-Frances O'Connor, associate professor of clinical psychology and psychiatry, tells me. 'Theories of what happens in grief have largely come from psychiatry and psychology,' she explains, adding that scientists who study the effects of grief in the body and those who study its impact on the mind rarely interact.

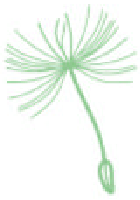
Yet, the two are, of course, interlinked. Take stress, for example. 'We're now aware of the impact stress can have on the body and losing someone has been shown to be the greatest life stressor we'll face,' adds Professor O'Connor. This stress is compounded, she adds, by the fact that you're having to cope with that stress without the person you'd normally turn to. Loneliness, too, has been shown to affect people physically – and it's one of the defining experiences of traumatic grief, says Joanne Cacciatore, a professor and researcher who specialises in traumatic bereavement – losing someone to violence, an accident, through suicide or drugs. ‘Loneliness has been shown to cause a host of physical problems and has been declared a public health problem, not only because of the emotional burden, but also the physiological burden,’ she explains. ‘That’s where it gets confounding. Is it the grief? The stress? The existential loneliness?’

SICK TO DEATH

While untangling physical and emotional grief is nigh on impossible, studies exploring the impact of grief on physical health do exist. Research has also shown that emotional pain is activated in the same regions of the brain (the anterior insula and the anterior cingulate cortex) as physical pain (and, as such, pain medications have been shown to ease it). ‘After my daughter’s death, my body hurt from top to toe,’ says Dr Cacciatore, who lost her daughter Cheyenne in childbirth in 1994. Alongside her research, Dr Cacciatore specialises in counselling those who’ve experienced traumatic grief, as founder of the grief support platform MISS Foundation and animal therapy community Selah Carefarm. ‘[Through my work] I hear of back pain, gastrointestinal trouble, nausea, headaches, difficulty sleeping, feeling physical tightness in the body… For me, it was my throat. I couldn’t swallow.’

Such ailments affect quality of life, but they can have real consequences for health, too. That the immune system is battered by grief explains why those who’ve been bereaved are more likely to catch a cold or develop sepsis. Studies also indicate an elevated risk for cardiovascular diseases, high blood pressure and heart attack. Then there’s actual broken-heart syndrome, known as takotsubo cardiomyopathy. Occurring almost exclusively in women, it refers to the weakening of the heart’s main pumping chamber, usually as a result of severe emotional – or physical – stress. So vulnerable are bereaved spouses that the relative risk of death for widows and widowers is 22% higher than their still married counterparts. The increased risk higher than that caused by smoking.

One explanation for grief’s brutal assault on the body lies in that insidious health marker, inflammation. In a 2018 study, researchers carried out interviews and measured the blood of just under 100 people whose spouses had recently died. They found that the blood samples of those who were experiencing ‘elevated grief,’ including feeling like life had lost its meaning, had inflammation levels 17% higher than those who didn’t feel that way. Intense stress, like that associated with grief, seems to over-activate the immune system leading to an



imbalance in inflammation, and the consequences can be serious. ‘Previous research has shown that inflammation contributes to almost every disease in older adulthood,’ said lead study author Chris Fagundes, assistant professor of psychological sciences at Rice University.

Such research doesn’t exactly make for comforting reading for the bereaved, who are already dealing with unprecedented levels of stress. But it’s important to note that, as well as being in its relative infancy, grief research is far from perfect. Most studies fail to account for gender differences. That’s despite the fact that up to 5% of women who are thought to have had a heart attack actually have takotsubo cardiomyopathy. Failing to account for gender has also created blind spots. Only recently have researchers started to consider hormones and their – potentially far-reaching – impact on grief. And while every expert I spoke to for this feature agreed that grief doesn’t have a time limit, many institutions don’t have the resources to follow participants over a period of months or years, meaning studies can only chart a single snapshot in time.

> **‘After my daughter’s death, my body hurt’**

THE AFTERLIFE

Reassuringly, one model, taking into account different research over the years, found that as the bereaved begin to stabilise, the physical symptoms subside for the majority of people. It’s at this point that some believe you can become able to think about the bereavement in a different way. ‘There’s this thing called post-traumatic growth, which shows that [those who’ve been bereaved] have a different view of relationships and a renewed sense of what’s important,’ says Lucy Hone, resilience researcher and co-founder of Coping With Loss, which runs practical support courses. Dr Hone was flung into the reality of her research when her 12-year-old daughter was killed in a car crash in 2014. One of the tools that helped her during this time was asking herself a question: is this helping or harming me? She gives the example of looking at photos of the person you’ve lost. ‘Asking yourself “is looking at photographs right now, when I have to pick the kids up from school, helping or harming me?” lets you become an active participant in your own grief,’ she explains. It’s a versatile question based in CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) and has been proven to increase resilience.

‘There are some losses from which we just don’t recover,’ adds Dr Cacciatore. Instead, she explains, you go through a process of ‘integration’. ‘Those who are allowing their grief are building the emotional muscle to carry it and, in my experience, have fewer physical symptoms.’ One of the key ways to do this is to have someone there to listen –someone who can, as she puts it, ‘bear witness’ to your grief. That could be a friend, a partner, a therapist or even an animal. And you don’t need to sever your attachment to the person you’ve lost, adds Dr Hone. ‘One of the newer [findings] in bereavement research is that it’s normal and healthy to establish an ongoing relationship with your dead,’ she explains. ‘You can keep them alive in your heart with something as simple as wearing a piece of their jewellery. The research shows that this helps the process and can help us move on.’

Wandering through London’s Brick Lane recently, I came across some street art that read, ‘Our strength is a ghost that others can’t see.’ It summed up how I feel my grief has shaped me, in many ways for the better. Perhaps my past has damaged my body (is *this* the real reason I catch every cold going?), but there are many things my grief has given me that I’m proud of. I’m someone who prioritises fun and making the most of all opportunities that come my way – I’m forever grateful for how full my life is. I’m also someone who doesn’t let the smaller stresses in life bring me down. I believe that’s come from the life lessons my mum taught me, but also the painful yet oh-so-real knowledge that the things we love can be snatched away from us. It’s a bittersweet gain, but I’m almost certain it’s enhanced my life in a number of ways, both big and small.

Post-traumatic growth reminds you what matters

Good grief

How to help ensure your loss doesn't impact your health, according to **Andy Langford,** clinical director at Cruse Bereavement Support

Go back to basics

Keeping yourself emotionally well is related to keeping physically well. Ask yourself: are you getting enough sleep? Eating a balanced diet? Staying hydrated? Getting outdoors? It might all be physical, but it makes us feel better emotionally.

Believe it will get better

Grief does have an impact on the body – people report stomach issues, muscular problems in their backs, headaches, being lethargic. These are usual symptoms. It's really hard to believe this at the time, but you will be okay.

Keep in touch

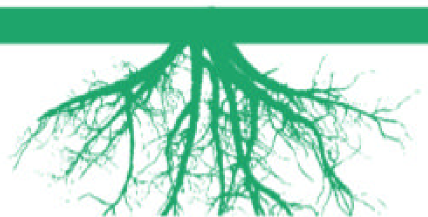
One of the hardest things to do after a bereavement is to resume your social life. However, research has shown that loneliness presents the same risk to your health as smoking or obesity, and is a major contributor to prolonged grief, so getting out and speaking to people can really help.

Know the difference

There will be times when you feel immersed in grief, but others when you get up and go to work. It's normal. But if you have a persistent feeling of longing for that person that affects your day-to-day, interrupts sleep and prevents connection, seek help.

Reach out

If you're worried about how you're feeling, either physically or emotionally, reach out to your GP, a bereavement counsellor or charity – Cruse Bereavement Support has a free online chat service, for example. It's always better to put support in place before you reach crisis point.



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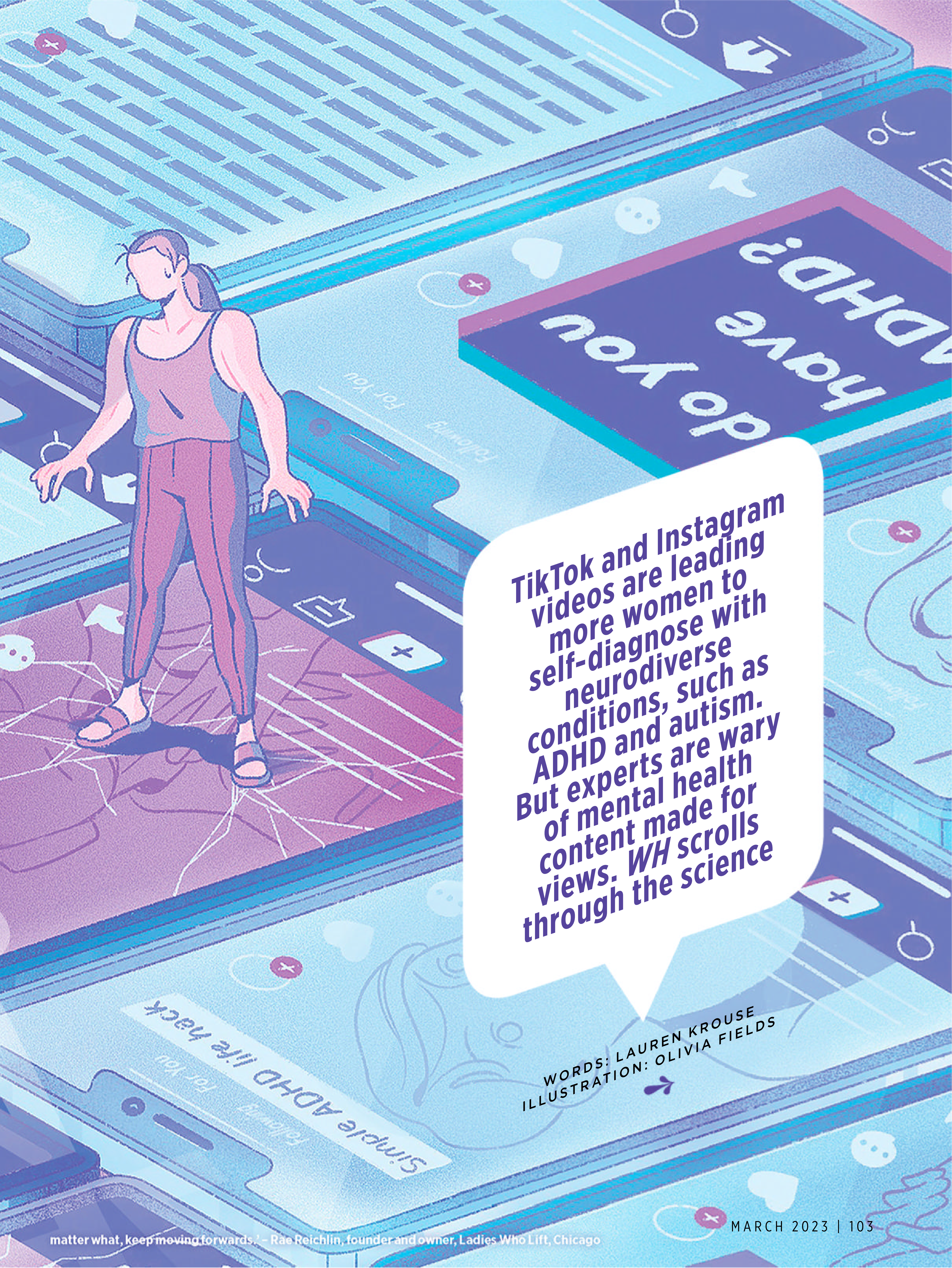
THE SOCIAL MEDIA MIRROR

For You
Following
For You
For You

'Just start. Pick up and seek out whatever advice, help and support you can along the way, but no


do you have ADHD?
Following
For you
Simple ADHD life hack

TikTok and Instagram videos are leading more women to self-diagnose with neurodiverse conditions, such as ADHD and autism. But experts are wary of mental health content made for views. *WH* scrolls through the science

WORDS: LAUREN KROUSE
ILLUSTRATION: OLIVIA FIELDS

matter what, keep moving forwards.' – Rae Reichlin, founder and owner, Ladies Who Lift, Chicago

The reality for Caitlin Manner is that she has always been surrounded by people whose brains work in unique ways. Her mum, dad, sister, brother and one of her sons all have attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD); her oldest and youngest are on the autism spectrum. She thought she was the exception – until she went on TikTok.

A busy mum in a military family, the 39-year-old struggled to manage her sons' medical appointments on top of school, sports and housework. She tried keeping open diaries in her bedroom, office and kitchen to make sure she didn't forget anything. But in the early spring of 2021, she missed a crucial appointment that her oldest needed in order to continue speech therapy. They'd already waited weeks for a coveted slot. Now, they'd have to wait three months to snag a new one. 'It was really frustrating because I knew how important it was and I still couldn't keep track of it,' says Caitlin. Despite her best efforts, her system wasn't working.

It was mid-pandemic and, desperate for a social outlet, Caitlin started spending more and more time on TikTok. 'It was a lifesaver for those long days,' she recalls. When videos about ADHD began to pop up on her For You page (FYP) – recommendations pulled by TikTok's algorithm – Caitlin found herself relating to others' stories, like how she could hop from chore to chore, never quite finishing any of them. 'By the end of the day, my house is a fricking mess and I haven't accomplished anything,' she remembers, quoting one memorable video. When Caitlin heard that, she thought: this is me. In April 2021, she went in for a consultation with a clinical psychologist. After a discussion about her personal history and symptoms, as well as a series of assessments, he confirmed that she had ADHD. 'It gave me a name for it, which meant I could start reframing my life,' she says.

Algorithm and blues

Over the past few years, TikTok and other forms of social media such as Instagram and Facebook have grown into makeshift mental health support networks. And while more studies are needed to determine how apps may affect us psychologically, TikTok has already served as a gateway to self-diagnosis for an untold number of users. 'I think it's clear that our systems are woefully under-equipped to manage the emerging mental health crisis happening right now,' says Wizdom Powell, an associate professor of psychiatry and the director of the Health Disparities Institute at UConn Health in the US.

This is particularly true on this side of the pond. Take ADHD, for which assessment and treatment remains a postcode lottery; many areas don't have an adult ADHD service at all and where they *do* exist, waiting times can be long. It's one reason there's been a rise in specialist ADHD centres where you can expect to pay between £500 and £1,000 to be assessed by a mental health professional. 'It's not surprising to me that under these conditions, people would turn to self-help resources more frequently, and in particular, rely on social media,' adds Dr Powell. Consider this your introduction to the growing online community of neurodivergent people, plus a to-do list if you suspect the algorithm's got you figured out.

Scroll through TikTok's #selfdiagnosis videos and you'll quickly find the #ND community. Being ND – or neurodivergent – means your brain operates in a way that's different from what society would consider normal or average (also known as neurotypical or NT). It's an extension of the idea of neurodiversity, says Lawrence Fung, a psychiatrist and the director of the Stanford Neurodiversity Project. Neurodiversity highlights that we all exist on a spectrum of varying levels of mental strengths and challenges based on neurological and behavioural traits. There is no set definition of what counts as neurodivergence. Rather, it's an umbrella term that's used to refer to many conditions that involve special or unusual ways of thinking. Among others, these may include ADHD, autism, obsessive-compulsive disorder, Tourette's syndrome and dyslexia.

'We're most likely to be successful at picking up new habits if – instead of trying to go 0 to 60 – we make

BILL
BILL
DUE

Videos often illustrate relatable ADHD symptoms

GET SUPPORT

If you suspect you might have ADHD, your GP should be your first port of call. While they can't diagnose you, they can refer you for a specialist assessment if your symptoms cannot be explained by a mental health condition or they're significantly affecting your day-to-day life. Where you're referred to will depend on what's available in your area, but an assessment may include a physical examination along with a series of interviews. If you do decide to seek a private diagnosis, look for resources on finding an ADHD psychiatrist and questions to ask your consultant.

Neuro networks

Social media provides people with a space to share their experiences with neurodivergence and to trade notes on self-advocacy. In 2020, TikTok use surged 180% among 15- to 25-year-olds, according to Statista, making it the most downloaded app that year. By September 2022, it was the most popular social media app on the Google Play store in the UK, with women accounting for over 60% of users. During the same period, self-reported mental health concerns soared; they troubled one in 10 adults in 2019 but about four in 10 by 2021*.

This isn't to suggest that these people were on TikTok – or another platform – and that it directly led to their concerns. Some of the people may have been experiencing an increase in pre-existing symptoms, with all the life changes related to the pandemic. And being exposed to

micro steps in the direction we want to go.' – Nina Kaiser, licensed psychologist and founder of Practice San Francisco

Following | For You
1K
50

Once you watch, the algorithm feeds you more

content that could give them a name for what they were feeling may have pushed them to see their struggles as real problems. Certainly, for some TikTok users, ND creators helped them recognise symptoms that had been there all along and, in a perfect world, would have been identified a long time ago.

Many forms of ND are diagnosed in infancy or childhood. But girls, women and gender-nonconforming people don't always fit into the typical diagnostic criteria of neurodivergence. Instead, their conditions are misunderstood as personality defects or quirks (see: hyperactive boy as the face of ADHD, versus girl with inattentive-type ADHD shrugged off as a daydreamer or... just a lazy, messy kid). In fact, studies suggest ADHD and autism may be under-diagnosed in women due to harder-to-identify symptoms and girls' ability to mask differences by imitating others. After years of thinking something's not quite right, finding a label – even if it comes from TikTok – can feel transformative.

Identity crisis

Uncovering a new piece of your identity can come with mixed emotions. When 25-year-old Ceasarae Galvan joined TikTok in 2019, her FYP and videos from creators such as @domesticblisters (KC Davis, a therapist and author who often speaks about ADHD) led to her diagnoses of autism and ADHD. Since starting therapy and medication that works for her, she's feeling better. But she's also had to navigate heavy feelings of anger and resentment. While she believes she could have been more successful if she'd been diagnosed sooner, she's making changes to the way she lives her life. 'The way I interact at work, how I do my laundry, all of it is now designed to work for me without any shame,' she says. A weekly meeting with her line manager, a flexible work set-up and plenty of baskets for organisation help her thrive.

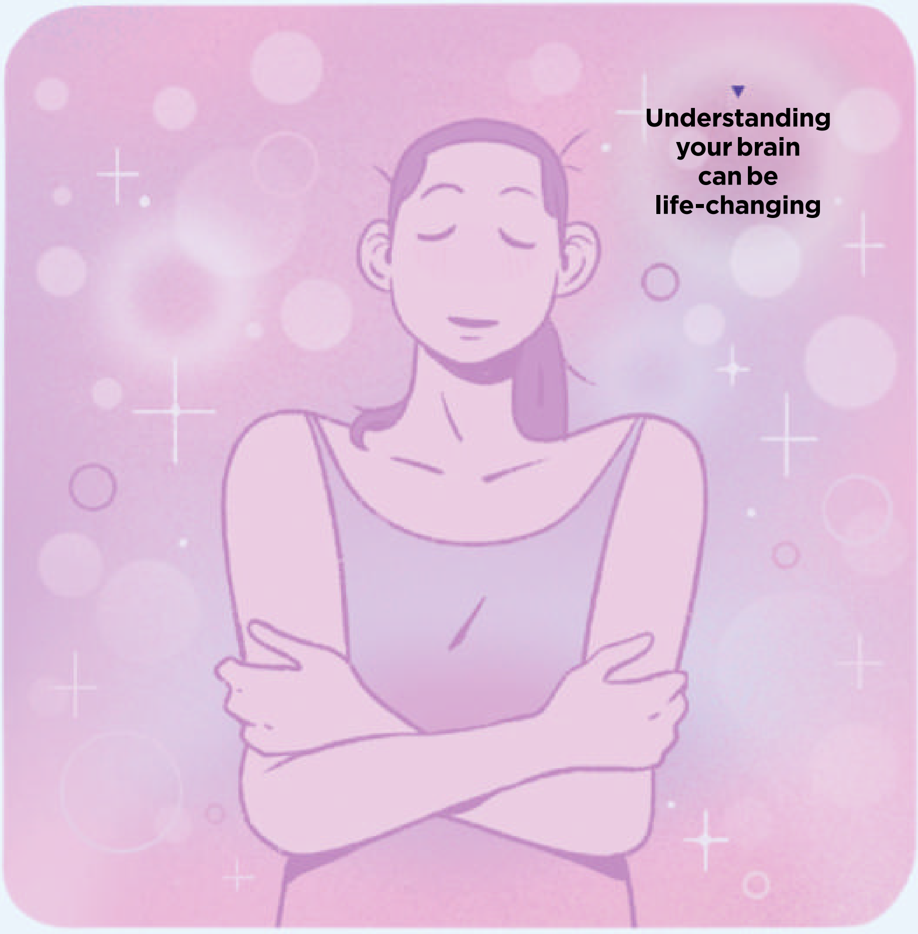
While it's empowering to learn about yourself and neurodivergence, social media as mental health support can be dangerous. First, there's the potential for misdiagnosis and over-diagnosis. Case in point: 52% of videos on #ADHD on TikTok presented misleading claims, according to a study published in *The Canadian Journal Of Psychiatry*. Ads can be tricky, too. Mental health support companies sometimes share misleading, influencer-style videos on TikTok and have been criticised by health experts for over-simplifying ADHD.

When 28-year-old Sammi Burke, a writer, editor and paramedic, began to suspect she had ADHD – thanks to her FYP – she scheduled an appointment with a psychiatrist. She wasn't a textbook case, but because she displayed some symptoms, they tried medication. It didn't seem to work and costs

49

THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF MINUTES UK ADULTS SPEND ON TIKTOK EVERY DAY*

See yourself? It might be time to talk to a pro


Understanding your brain can be life-changing

were piling up, so Sammi dropped her treatment. It was only later that she realised that some of the factors that made it difficult for her to focus on her computer work may have been more situation-based: noisy neighbours whose kids stayed up late could be a frustrating distraction for anyone. Then there was her excessive workload. 'I still don't know if I have ADHD for sure,' she reflects. 'I wasn't so much looking for a label as I was for a way to get through my working day.' Since leaving her high-stress editorial job, life has become a bit easier. In Sammi's case, the algorithm wasn't on the nose about what she was dealing with, and it led her down a path that wasn't very useful. This is not uncommon. Still, if someone is struggling – for any reason – and seeks help, they deserve support and clarity, whether or not they fit the diagnostic terms for the condition they initially think they're living with.

Logging off

Mental health is influenced by a complex combination of life experiences mixed with genetics and more. It can be difficult for people who might not fall at either extreme of the spectrum to differentiate between challenges with universal or temporary causes (the economy, hustle culture) and those that are personal or permanent (neurodivergence). That's before you account for the horoscope effect. Also known as the 'Barnum effect', it refers to the way that often-repeated and broadly relatable content can lead someone to believe they have a condition whether or not they really do, says Dr Powell. When it feels like the algorithm is psychic or magical, it's tempting to take video suggestions as meaningful insights about who you are.

TikTokers often recommend taking loads of online assessments for conditions such as ADHD or autism, but these tests were not designed to be used that way. They're best taken with the help of a clinician who can expand on your initial answers and search for subtleties that could indicate different or co-occurring diagnoses. A diagnosis 'is really not cut-and-dry, and it's not about a checklist', says Dr Fung. Without help, you might also miss diseases that masquerade as other conditions or overlap with them, such as hyperthyroidism (which, like anxiety, can cause a racing heartbeat).

Bottom line? Think of self-diagnosis as a starting point. From there, at the very least, getting information from reputable sources is essential to ensuring you're not building an explanation or an understanding of yourself that's based on bad intel. For Caitlin, TikTok was a gateway to deeper knowledge of herself and how to care for her mental health. She's started treatment and is currently trying to find the medication dose that works for her before moving on to developing other coping mechanisms. In the meantime, she's working on being more compassionate with herself. 'I'm much better at self-advocating for time to regulate, and my understanding of myself has improved immeasurably,' she says. 'And it was all thanks to strangers in a 60-second format.'

*SOURCES: KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION; INSIDER INTELLIGENCE

SCROLL PATROL

HOW TO TELL IF YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA SOURCE IS LEGIT

Red flags

- They speak in absolute terms (such as 'If X, congratulations you have ADHD!' or 'This isn't X – it's your ADHD').
- They universalise personal experiences, as if what happened to them applies to all cases, and suggest specific treatments.
- They have questionable credentials, if any. (They may have a degree – but it's unclear what they do or if they're practising with clients like you.)
- They don't show their research, or they refer you to articles that aren't attached to a credible source.

Green flags

- They present possibilities with disclaimers (keywords include may, might, could, possibly, maybe).
- They share their personal story and coping tools – but make it clear this may not apply to others.
- They have clear credentials in their bio (Dr, PhD, clinical psychologist, psychiatrist).
- They share links to peer-reviewed research and professional organisations to back up any claims.

'Creating massive change is much easier than we're conditioned to believe.' – Lisa Marie Bobby, psychologist

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Raising the spa

There was a time when the word ‘spa’ meant a Jacuzzi set to turbo mode. But it’s 2023, self-care is a verb and the industry has responded in kind. From mud baths in Yorkshire to celeb facials in the New Forest, consider this your guide to getting pampered on home soil

COMPILED BY AMANDA STATHAM

ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES

Await your light therapy in a cabana

01

Leicester Sq, London

What: Subterranean self-care
Where: The Londoner, London
Who: Georgie Lane-Godfrey, features and membership director
Go: Rooms from £400pn. Spa experiences from £370 for a half-day; thelondoner.com

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The low-down

Set in the south-west corner of Leicester Square, a stone's throw from both Theatreland and M&M's World, The Londoner is about as central London as central London gets. The hotel is *swanky*; it's a self-described 'super boutique hotel', it regularly rolls out the red carpet for events and if your sightseeing vibe is more celeb-spotting than big red bus tour, the hotel bar is a tourist attraction in its own right. However, it's the subterranean wellness floor that sets this slice of London real estate apart from its SW1 neighbours – and where the location comes into its own. The Londoner is the capital's first 'iceberg hotel' – it has eight floors above ground and eight floors below (geddit?) with the wellness floor on minus four. It means mere moments after leaving the good people of Leicester Square to their breakfasting, busking and boozing, you're transported to another world entirely.

Top treatments

The Retreat experience begins with the sunken pool: decorated with pillars, it could be mistaken for a Roman bath – if a Roman bath also had poolside cabanas where you can order your very own LED light-therapy machine to sooth your skin while you acclimatise. Cabanas are bookable for two, four and eight hours, and with the pool adults-only for most of the day (with the exception of 10.30am to 12pm and 3.30pm to 5pm), you could spend the day doing little else. But the carefully curated treatment menu is well worth a browse, too. Facials come courtesy of the Hungarian luxury skincare brand Omorovicza and the country provides the backdrop to much of the menu, from traditional Hungarian facial massage techniques to mineral-rich mud from Hungary's Lake Hévíz. Meanwhile, the massage menu reads like a wellness wish list, with packages that promise to enhance your energy levels or calm your cortisol, depending on where you find yourself. But what elevates The Retreat's offering from your average spa is the addition of its medical arm; headed up by osteopath Dhirindar Bhullar, body realignment services include physiotherapy and medical acupuncture.

Best of the rest

Can't spare the time for a spa day? All of the treatments on the Quick Fix menu are 45 minutes or less, so if you find yourself in London and at a loose end, or on a lunch hour, there's time enough to treat yourself. Over in the salon you can have your hair done by hairstylist Hiro Miyoshi, get a pedicure from celeb manicurist Ama Quashie, or get your sweat on in the state-of-the-art gym. But with six (count 'em) restaurants, a cinema and a roof terrace, frankly, wellness is just the tip of the iceberg.

02

Harrogate, North Yorkshire

What: Mud baths and massages in Yorkshire
Where: Rudding Park, Harrogate
Who: Emma Gritt, executive editor (digital)
Go: One-night spa break from £448pp, including dinner, Yorkshire breakfast, access to The Spa and a 50-minute treatment; ruddingpark.co.uk

The low-down

Self-care seekers have been flocking to the affluent Yorkshire town of Harrogate since Queen Victoria was on the throne. But while the dedicated pamperers of yore were happy to bask in the area's natural spring water, today we get to while away the hours in the more ambient environs of hot tubs, saunas and heated swimming pools. And I know which self-care era I'd choose. Set in 300 acres of woodland and landscaped gardens, Rudding Park is the best of both worlds – the Grade II-listed Regency-style house is straight out of a Jane Austen novel, while the award-winning spa delivers contemporary luxury at its most decadent.

Top treatments

And so to the roof. Rudding Park's spa is the UK's first rooftop spa and garden – and it's a high that's hard to climb down from. Up among the clouds you'll find scented steam rooms, oxygen pods and a hydrotherapy infinity pool. And if all those bubbles aren't doing it for you, the ones in your champagne glass will be (did I say decadent?). Down on lower ground, you'll find the treatment rooms where an invigorating body polish and head, neck and shoulder massage left me simultaneously energised and comatose and my skin as soft as cashmere. And in the unlikely event that your brain is *still* trained on your inbox, I prescribe a trip to the Relaxation Zone – the slumber room complete with twinkling lights to mimic a dark, starry night. (This one might just be my new favourite room.)

Best of the rest

Make like the Victorians and take a turn around the hotel's immaculate grounds, or work on your 10,000 steps by doing the 3.5-mile walk to the village of Follifoot. Feeling brave? Have a cold foot bath inspired by Kneipp water therapy – it boosts your circulation and, believe it or not, your frozen toes quickly feel human again. Oh – and don't leave without ordering the sublime truffle parmesan tater tots at the Clocktower Brasserie.

The rooftop spa won't fail to uplift you

A sun trap in the New Forest

03

New Forest, Hampshire

What: Celeb facials in Hampshire
Where: Lime Wood Hotel, New Forest National Park
Who: Bridie Wilkins, fitness editor
Go: Rooms from £405pn. Breakfast can be included at an additional cost; limewoodhotel.co.uk

The low-down

Perhaps it's the bounty of swimming pools. Or maybe it's the claw-foot bathtubs straight from an interiors Pinterest board. But Lime Wood Hotel is pampering at its peak. The spa, known as the Herb House, is just that; it's topped with a herb garden where many of the plants used in treatments begin life. But the hotel's beating heart is downstairs. Allow me to paint you a picture: after 10 leisurely laps of the 16-metre indoor pool (but really, who's counting?), you head to the hydrotherapy area for a self-massage using the full-body jets. Oh, and did I mention you're forest bathing? Thanks to the floor-to-ceiling windows, the New Forest is perfectly visible in all its verdant glory.

Top treatments

Key among the spa's USPs is that it's one of only two UK locations to offer treatments by celeb facialist Sarah Chapman (from £160), but a programme of Voya body wraps (the seaweed wrap is most popular) and Bamford massages are also in daily rotation; a sucker for anything that promises to calm my cortisol, I opt for the latter. After an Epsom salt foot bath ritual (designed to help reduce inflammation by maximising your magnesium absorption), my therapist targets a series of 'Shiatsu pressure points' to balance my energy flow and release tension, before moving on to a Swedish back and leg massage and finishing on a reflexology-inspired foot massage. The cherry on top: a post-treatment nap in the relaxation room.

Best of the rest

Alongside a state-of-the-art rooftop gym, where private PT sessions and consultations with nutritionist Amelia Freer are available, there's a full fitness timetable on offer. Spinning, circuits, Pilates and more are held in the light-drenched fitness studio, while yoga takes place in the Hideout – an outdoor studio with panoramic windows and a canvas roof, to flow from boat to butterfly to the sound of birdsong. And when you're ready to float downstairs for dinner, you'll be fed by superstar chef Angela Hartnett, whose roasted butternut squash carpaccio I've been thinking about ever since. If you can bring yourself to leave, the New Forest is on your doorstep – Hunter wellies and bikes are provided, and the staff can recommend routes. Don't fancy it? Don't blame you. Back to the pool you go.

04

Antrim, Northern Ireland

What: CBD massages by a river
Where: Galgorm, Ballymena, Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland
Who: Yanar Alkayat, health and fitness testing manager
Go: Cottage Suite from £185pn midweek and from £395pn at weekends; galgorm.com

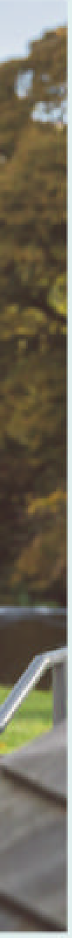
The low-down

The sprawling hotel and spa resort in rural Northern Ireland is a rabbit warren of relaxation, with every path delivering you a new way to chill; it's an adult playground, where 'playing' equates to doing absolutely nothing. The resort is the namesake of the river that flows through it – and it flows through it in every sense, from greeting you proudly at the entrance to providing the soundscape to your mid-morning hot tub, thundering past and commanding your full attention. In fact, nature is baked

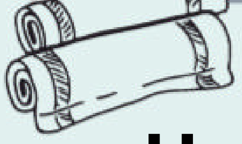
into every single element of the Galgorm experience; the glass-walled sauna and pool rooms bathe you in natural light while the riverside terrace hugging the spa cafe is alfresco dining at its best.

Top treatments
The robes-only Thermal Spa Village is the star attraction, with hot- and cold-water experiences spanning indoors and out; and it's here where you'll float through the day. If you can tear yourself away from the waterbeds bordering the main pool, dedicate an afternoon to a hot-tub crawl (like a pub crawl, but wetter) before finishing the day with a stroll through the forest. Back inside, the spa menu has nine treatments: the latest – the Oto CBD Signature Treatment – is a body massage and facial delivered on tiny quartz stones (a bed of nails, it isn't). After a warming foot soak, the treatment begins with an exfoliating skin scrub and a full-body cooling compress. The massage uses bamboo rollers for a firmer touch and, combined with the therapist's fingers and palms, the effect is fluid and dreamy. A mini bamboo roller is back out for the facial, but with a lighter touch, and the head and scalp massage that follows is the ideal tension-releasing climax.

Best of the rest
Each part of the hotel and spa has its own interior style. Traditional period antiques grace the foyer; The Conservatory, where breakfast is served, is bright and airy with classic, elegant furnishings; Gilles Grill, for dinner and live music, has a gastropub feel; while the Thermal Spa Village is designed with laid-back luxury in mind. But it takes a good 24 hours to get your bearings and bed in, so it's well worth booking a two-day package (as if you needed an excuse anyway).



Work on your wellbeing in the dome



05

Upminster, Essex

What: LED facials in rural Essex
Where: Glass House Retreat, Upminster
Who: Nikki Osman, executive editor (print)
Go: Skin retreat from £1,410pp, including four nights in a superior room, skin consultation, three facials, full-board and access to facilities and classes; glasshouseretreat.co.uk

The low-down
My skin barrier has been compromised. And while this is unlikely to trouble the good people of MI5, it is deeply troubling me. An overly aggressive retinol regime might have something to do with my crater-like complexion, but a throw-the-kitchen-sink-at-it approach to barrier-boosting products has only made my acne angrier. So when I heard that Glass House – a dedicated wellness centre in that bit of Essex that's still on the District line – was launching the UK's first skin retreat, I was over there quicker than you can say double cleanse. Billed as the first purpose-built detox and wellness retreat, Glass House opened its doors in autumn 2019, before promptly closing them again the following spring in the wake of you-know-what. Today, you can pop into the cryotherapy chamber after breakfast, enjoy an algae body wrap after lunch and squeeze in a chakra workshop before tea, alongside a bulging fitness timetable including everything from boxing to barre.

Top treatments
The beauty of the Glass House skin retreat is that it's bespoke to you, and the combination of potent products and innovative tech (Dermalux, Lipofirm and Mesoboost are all on the menu) promises visible results by check-out time. The skin retreat begins on arrival, when you pop your face inside a skin scanner that measures up to 2mm beneath the skin's surface. The scoring system for everything from UV exposure to pore size feels a bit like being in beauty school (texture: 34%, poor). But it's enlightening nonetheless and I'm prescribed a morning and evening skincare routine using samples from Image Skincare, along with a series of facials. Among the, frankly, magic that my therapist performs on me in the three days I'm under her care is an Enzyme Ormedic Lift – a deep but gentle exfoliation using fruit enzymes – and a Dermalux LED facial, which uses red and blue light to target various skincare concerns.

Best of the rest
When I wasn't having facials, I was summoning the courage to have a dunk in the natural pond, moving my laptop-addled spine through some yin yoga poses and doing a guided meditation in the glass wellness dome.

06

Moddershall, Staffordshire

What: Sustainable skincare in Staffordshire
Where: Moddershall Oaks Country Spa Retreat, Moddershall
Who: Amanda Statham, contributing travel editor
Go: Spa days from £100pp; one-night spa breaks from £175pp; moddershalloaks.com

The low-down

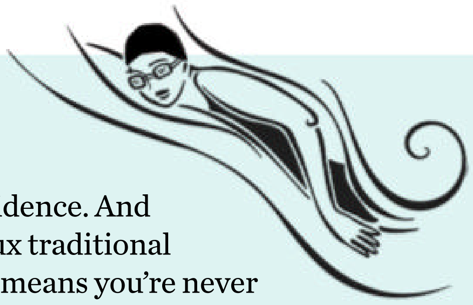
I was staring into the middle distance of the 72 acres of rolling Staffordshire countryside when the marketing slogan for this cosy converted farmhouse spa came to me. And if the good people of Moddershall Oaks don't go with 'Chill On The Hill', frankly, they're missing a trick. Overlooking a lake, woodland and fields, Moddershall is about as far removed from a city spa as you can get, but with enough facilities during the arrival tour to signal you're in for a treat. Once your skin lets you know that you've spent quite enough time in the heated indoor pool, hydrotherapy pool and tropical rain shower, you can take those wrinkly fingers (and toes) to the Blush Lounge for manis and pedis before wrapping them around a glass of something cold and delicious in the rooftop bar.

Top treatments

Moddershall Oaks is a small spa, but the treatments punch well above their price tag, with products by Tribe157, a natural, sustainable skin and body care line produced on a farm in South Wales. I settled in for the signature 50-minute Enlighten Massage, during which my therapist paid special attention to my upper back, legs and arms using a botanical butter balm. Feeling the knots in my shoulders being worked on firmly (I wimped out of heavy pressure and opted for medium) and slowly loosening was that fine line between pleasure and pain. But by the end of the session, I felt calm, content and cocooned, while a post-therapy snooze in the sleep lounge delivered the kind of unencumbered peace that knackered parents' dreams are made of.

Best of the rest

The Oak House restaurant's recent extension, with floor-to-ceiling windows and views of the lake, is a spectacular addition and the food is reassuringly indulgent – I tucked into Tenderstem broccoli with chilli and garlic, and pan-fried salmon with potato rosti, chased by a cheese platter. Bedrooms are modern with well-stocked mini bars (hello, Candy Kitten sweets) and doors that open straight on to a private terrace, where you can slip into a hot tub after a hard day's relaxing. The perfect spot for plotting your next marketing pitch.



07

Hook, Hampshire

What: *Downton*-esque decadence in Hampshire
Where: The Four Seasons, Hampshire
Who: Claire Sanderson, editor-in-chief
Go: Spa days from £195pp; one-night spa breaks from £585; fourseasons.com

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The low-down

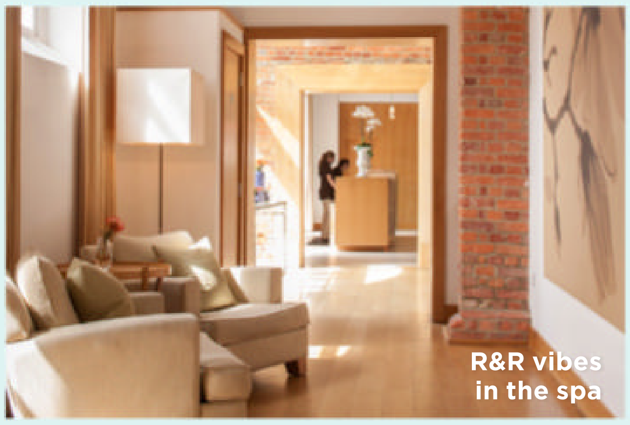
There's something decidedly *Downton* about The Four Seasons' Hampshire outpost – and not just because it's less than an hour from Highclere Castle, where the show is filmed. From the moment you enter the front gates and drive up the sweeping road to the imposing 18th-century manor house, you feel like you've stumbled upon a royal residence. And from the lux traditional decor that means you're never in doubt that you're in a grand stately home, to the guests clay-pigeon shooting in the grounds, the feeling that you've happened upon a country retreat enjoyed by the upper classes in another age never leaves you. And yet, the vibe is anything but stuffy. The centrepiece of the spa is a huge, heated pool – which extends outside on warm, summer days – while the Wild Carrot restaurant serves up the vibe of a London members' club alongside exquisite locally sourced food. That said, it has the London prices to match, especially the cocktails, so it's worth keeping an eye on prices so you're not taken by surprise when the bill arrives.

Top treatments

Sunloungers surrounding the pool both inside and out demand to be relaxed upon. Both children and dogs are welcome and an indoor kids' activity pool, complete with waterfalls, ought to keep them occupied. Off duty? The spa treatment menu is vast, with an impressive array of de-stressing treatments on offer. My husband Dan and I both opted for massages – a deep tissue one for me, the kind you fall asleep during for him; we both came away happy.

Best of the rest

If you've got energy to expend, try horse riding around the grounds, hire a narrowboat on the nearby canal or head to the on-site gym and try a daily group class.



R&R vibes in the spa

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FITNESS EDIT

OFTEN FEEL FATIGUED AND LACKING ENERGY? TRY MAGNESIUM.

Feeling tired and don't know why? You're not alone. According to a recent study, less than half of us consume our recommended daily amount of magnesium, a mineral that helps turn the food we eat into energy.

Best known for helping to reduce tiredness and fatigue, magnesium is vital for our health as it's needed for hundreds of cellular processes within the body. Deficiency can cause mood swings, migraines, eye twitches and muscle cramps.

If you have low magnesium levels, you are also less likely to get a good night's sleep. It's present in foods such as black beans, bananas and pumpkin seeds, but to get the benefits we need to absorb it into our bodies.

One way to ensure we consume a consistent level of magnesium is by taking a daily supplement – but not all supplements are equal. Your body's ability to absorb the magnesium depends on the way that the supplement is made.

'Most supplements use magnesium oxide – it is the most common form, as it has a high concentration of magnesium but it's not easily released into the body,' explains Dr Miriam Ferrer PhD, head of product development at FutureYou Cambridge.

'Taking more magnesium to try and make up for the problem isn't the best approach, as too much can cause an upset stomach so we created Magnesium+ using magnesium lactate which is twice as absorbable as a standard magnesium oxide supplement. This means you need much less per capsule to deliver the same amount, making it a much more efficient way to take this essential mineral.'

Reviews on independent website Trustpilot speak of the effectiveness of Magnesium+ with one five star review saying 'Really pleased with the Magnesium supplements after 2 months. I have more energy, sleeping much better and have 'got my brain back'! By which I mean I feel sharper and interested in things again.'

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FutureYou Cambridge is offering you the chance to try Magnesium+ for free with its 28 day subscription trial. To claim your free subscription trial pack worth £11.50 all you have to do is visit **FutureYouOffers.co.uk** or freephone **0800 808 5740** and quote the code **MGF598** at checkout.

Your trial pack is free (just pay £1.50 postage) and you will be enrolled into a flexible subscription costing £11.50 (inc. postage) every 28 days, which you can cancel, pause or amend at any time, without obligation.
Everybody is different and it takes time for the levels of magnesium to increase in your bloodstream so it could take 2-3 months for you to feel a difference.
Introductory offer valid for new UK customers only. Offer expires 31st March 2023 and cannot be used in conjunction with any other promotions. See FutureYouHealth.com/MGF598 for full terms and conditions.

***Magnesium contributes to a reduction of tiredness and fatigue, a normal energy-yielding metabolism, normal functioning of the nervous system, normal muscle function and normal psychological function.**

EMPOWERING WOMEN EVERYWHERE: INTRODUCING THE FRAUPOW WEARABLE BREAST PUMP

As International Women's Day approaches, so does the second birthday of the Fraupow Wearable Breast Pump, a successful business launched by savvy Mum Sunita Boyes to support women to breastfeed while juggling all the other needs of their busy lives.

The majority of new Mums will pump breastmilk at some point. Whilst breastfeeding itself is free, the cost of all the accessories that a Mum can accumulate to make breastfeeding convenient and comfortable can quickly add up!

The Fraupow Wearable Pump is a wireless, hands-free breast pump. Designed to be worn inside the bra, it allows busy mums to pump milk whilst getting on with all the other stuff they need to do. Lighter than the leading alternative it weighs in at just 218g, and it also holds 180ml of milk – 30ml more than the competition, meaning that mums can pump greater quantities without having to stop to empty the milk chamber or change bottles.

The Fraupow Pump is loaded with features that ensure it keeps up with or beats other pumps, at less than half the price.

The new upgraded Fraupow Wearable Pump, which costs £89.99, comes bundled with 3 x 1-2-1 private online consultations with a qualified midwife – worth £140 on their own! At the heart of everything Fraupow does is the aim to support women when they need it the most.

The first 100 Women's Health readers to order from www.fraupow.com can get 10% off their Wearable Pump and breastfeeding accessories with the code WH10.

THE HEALTH &

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menstrual cup
asan
menstrual cup

WORK OUT ON YOUR PERIOD

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Cromwell Hospital

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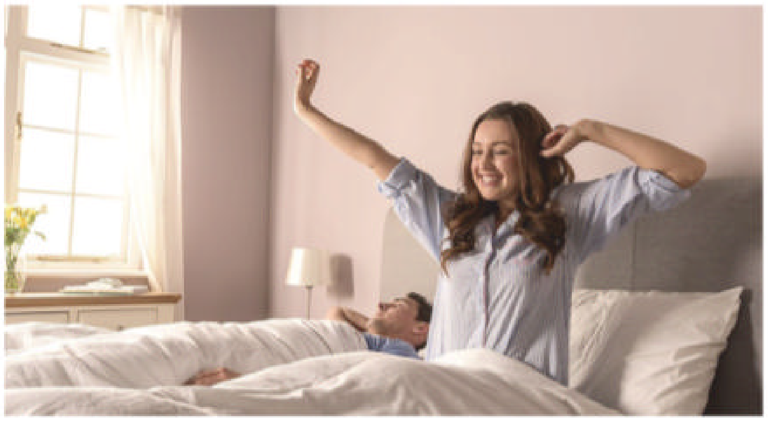
FITNESS EDIT



MATTRESSMAN – BRITAIN'S BIGGEST MATTRESS SPECIALIST

Mattressman is passionate about everything sleep, reflected in their extensive range of 8000 premium bed frames, mattresses and bedding accessories at prices that reflect fantastic value from recognisable and trusted brands, including Silentnight and Relyon, among others. Mattressman has enhanced the nation's sleep since 2004, with their sleep experts providing impartial and tailored advice online and in their showrooms across the country.

In conjunction with their commitment to everything sleep, Mattressman recognises the fundamental need to take proactive measures towards the preservation of our planet and, alongside their zero-landfill disposal service in which, they can responsibly dispose of customers' bed frames and mattresses to combat discarded bedroom furniture, Mattressman has partnered with Ecologi to reduce carbon emissions. Ecologi will plant a tree for every product sold by Mattressman in-store or online to help reduce carbon emissions. Mattressman's environmental commitment can be seen throughout its product range too; for example, the AirSprung collection incorporates environmentally friendly materials into their mattresses, such as the mattress's sleeping side, which is created from 100% ocean-bound plastic collected from within 50 kilometres of the coast and waterways in regions with underdeveloped waste or recycling systems, or a comfort layer that is comprised of 80% plush, cosy recyclable polyester.

Mattressman is regarded as a company that embodies everything National Bed Month stands for, with a passion for creating comfortable and supportive sleeping solutions accessible for the nation regardless of sleeping requirements, preferences and budget.

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First, order the Teeth-Veneer 2.0 online and get an impression set. With the set delivered afterwards, including instructions, you can easily make an impression of your teeth at home. If you still need help, you can always contact the service team via Whatsapp, there will be happy to support you.

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FITNESS EDIT

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MY LIFE IN WELLNESS

Andi Oliver

The TV chef on getting back on her bike after a hysterectomy and the joy of sharing home-cooked meals

STATS
AGE: 59
JOB: Chef and broadcaster
FITNESS MO:
Peloton rides
WIND-DOWN SECRET:
Cooking

Nourish

When my friend [singer] Neneh Cherry and I were broke single parents, we'd turn £15 into meals to last for days. We'd buy a bag of potatoes from the market. I still prefer markets for fresh ingredients.

Investigate

Last year, despite exercising six times a week, I felt shit – something wasn't right. My GP sent me for an ultrasound and a gynaecologist found 10 fibroids in my womb. They were so large it was like I was five months pregnant. I've since had a full hysterectomy.

Recover

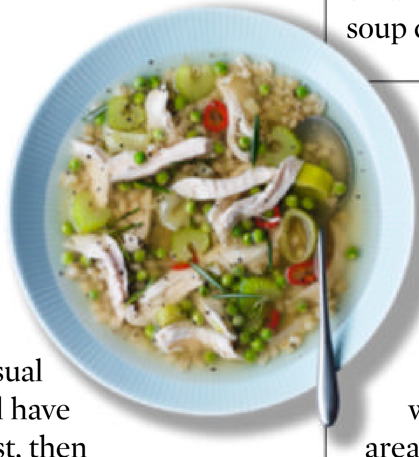
I'm an energetic person, but after surgery, I don't have the extra reserves to draw from. It's been a lesson in surrendering: you have to respect the time recovery takes and be patient. But it doesn't come naturally to me. I moved in with [my daughter] Miquita for a period immediately after the procedure so she could look after me – it was a funny role reversal.

Train

I get up at 6am and hop on my Peloton before starting my day. Since my operation I do gentle 20-min sessions and I'm gradually working my way back up to speed. My favourite instructor is Hannah Frankson – she strikes the perfect balance of emotional support and physical motivation. When I work away, I send my Peloton in a van and have it installed wherever I'm staying.

Cook

During my recovery, I've not been allowed to lift anything heavy, which means no cooking. I've missed our usual rhythm. We'll have a Sunday roast, then that chicken or lamb bone will go into a pot on Monday. I'll simmer it with onions, garlic, ginger, chilli and the moody-looking stuff from the bottom drawer in the fridge. People waste food as salad leaves can look a bit sad – but they're perfect for a stew or soup.



Smooth

Another daily feel-good ritual is taking care of my skin. I've used Palmer's cocoa butter on my body and my face for decades, ever since I can remember. I've also recently started using the most brilliant skin butter that my stylist Shara Johnson's mum makes at home. It's made using natural ingredients and it makes your skin feel so silky. I've been buying it for everyone in my family.'

Appreciate

You don't need expensive ingredients to make a delicious meal. People in poorer communities – especially in the Caribbean, India, Ireland – have created incredible food using the bits the [wealthy] didn't want. That's how Caribbean oxtail and Scottish oxtail soup came into existence.

Connect

During tough times like these, check in on each other. Food's a great vehicle to start conversations with people in your area. Knock on your neighbour's door and take some food. We live in a multicultural society – and this translates to our food. There will be so much to discover from people you haven't met yet.

Andi Oliver is working with Crockpot on its #mealsformore campaign*

AS TOLD TO EMMA GRITT. PHOTOGRAPHY: COPYRIGHT OPTOMEN TELEVISION © 2020, AN ALL3MEDIA COMPANY. ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES; STUDIO 33; STEVE BAXTER. *#MEALSFORMORE AIMS TO DONATE 250,000 MEALS VIA @FARESHAREUK – A UK CHARITY WORKING TO TACKLE HUNGER AND FOOD WASTE

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